Men-at-Arms

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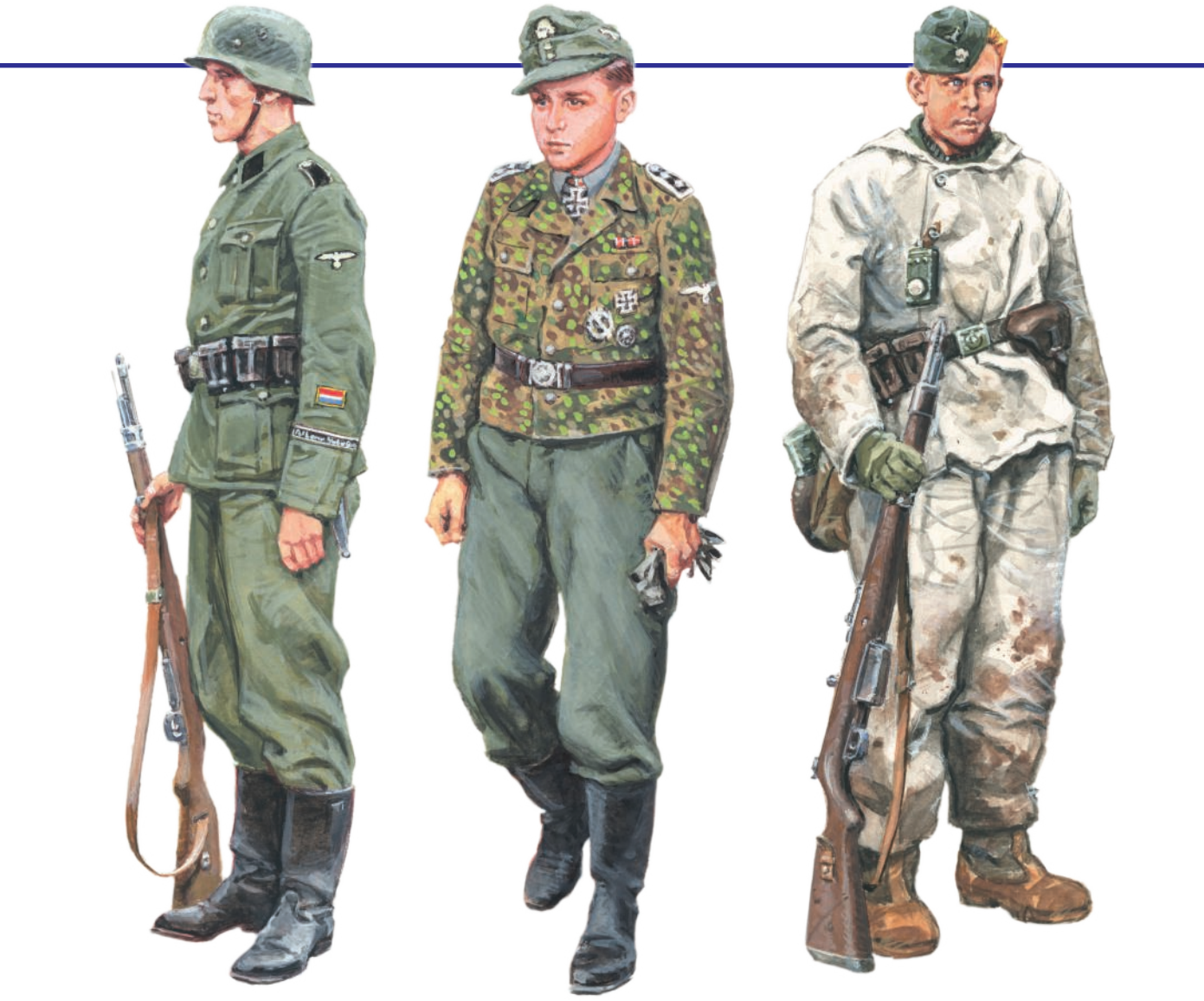
Dutch Waffen-SS Legion & Brigade 1941–44



Massimiliano Afiero • Illustrated by Ramiro Bujeiro

Men-at-Arms • 531

Dutch Waffen-SS Legion & Brigade 1941–1944

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Series editor Martin Windrow

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DUTCH WAFFEN-SS LEGION & BRIGADE 1941–1944

INTRODUCTION

During the volatile 1930s, many political movements throughout Europe were inspired by the popular success of Italian Fascism and German National Socialism. It was therefore unsurprising that when the Netherlands was occupied by German forces in May 1940, thousands of Dutchmen chose to enlist in German military and paramilitary organizations. Soon after Germany invaded the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, a Volunteer Netherlands Legion *(Freiwilligen Legion Niederlande*, in German) was formed by the Waffen-SS to participate in the 'crusade against Bolshevism'. The Legion was engaged on the Leningrad front until April 1943, when it was withdrawn to be reorganized into a new SS-Freiwilligen Panzergrenadier Brigade 'Nederland', as part of SS-Gruf Felix Steiner's so-called 'Germanic' III. SS-Panzer Korps, alongside the largely Scandinavian 11. SS-Frw PzGren Division 'Nordland'.

After training in Croatia, Gen Steiner's III. SS-Pz Korps was transferred to the Oranienbaum front south of Leningrad at the turn of 1943/44. Thereafter the Dutch SS brigade participated in all the most bitter and costly defensive battles on the northern sector of the Russian Front: Leningrad, the Narva bridgehead, the Tannenbergstellung, Tartu (Dorpat) and the Kurland pocket. In January 1945 its remnants were shipped to Pomerania, where they were absorbed into a new formation designated (nominally) as 23. SS-Frw PzGren Div 'Nederland' (see MAA 415, *The Waffen-SS (3): 11. to 23. Divisions*). This book covers the Dutch units before that final redesignation.

Fascism in the Netherlands: the NSB and WA

Of several distinct movements, the most important was the *National Socialistische Beweging in Nederland* (NSB, 'National Socialist Movement in the Netherlands') founded by Anton Mussert. From November 1932 the NSB had its own *Weer Afdeelingen* militia (WA, 'defence sections') modelled on the German SA. Dissolved by the Dutch government in December 1935, the WA would be re-established in May 1940 after the German occupation.

Anton Mussert (left), *Leider* of the NSB, with Arie Zondervan, *Commandant* of the movement's WA militia. Despite imitating the Nazi Party in the name of his movement and his own title, and the SS in its uniform, Mussert still claimed to support the Dutch royal house and Christian values. His adoption of the outward trappings of Fascism followed political fashions of the 1930s in order to gather followers. For a note on Zondervan, see Plate Commentary B1. (Photo from wartime WA calendar)

In 1934 the NSB had 20,000 members, but in the 1935 elections it obtained some 300,000 votes, and the number of its adherents grew steeply until the outbreak of the war. A few days before the German invasion the most pro-Nazi of the NSB's leaders, Rost von Tonningen, was arrested among many others accused of being part of an alleged 'fifth column', and some were summarily executed during the first hours of the war. In the event only about 100 NSB members openly collaborated with the invaders, and, far from encouraging this activity, Mussert expelled them from the party.

The Dutch government and royal family escaped to England on 13 May 1940, and two days later the military capitulated. Mussert thought his time had come, but experience with the Norwegian collaborationist leader Vidkun Quisling had made the Germans wary. They did not involve the NSB in their takeover of power, and Mussert was not authorized to broadcast to the population.[1] On 19 May, the German Dr Artur Seyss-Inquart was appointed Reich Commissioner for the occupied Netherlands, and a public appeal, written by Hitler himself, called for the reintegration of the Netherlands into the 'Germanic' community.

DUTCH VOLUNTEERS FOR THE SS

The Netherlands was one of the countries that provided the largest number of volunteers for the Waffen-SS as a proportion of its population, and individuals sought to enrol in the German military immediately following the occupation. Consequently, Hitler personally authorized a new Waffen-SS unit ten days after the Dutch capitulation.

The 'Westland' Regiment

On 25 May 1940, the formation of a new SS 'Westland' Regiment to accept Dutch and Flemish-speaking Belgian volunteers was announced, under the command of SS-Staf (Col) Hilmar Wäckerle. The first Dutch volunteers were sent to Freimann barracks in Munich to begin their training, and in December 1940 the 'Westland' was incorporated in the new SS 'Wiking' Division, in which it would remain throughout the war. On 9 June 1940, SS-Ogruf (Gen) Gottlob Berger, head of the SS-FHA (SS Leadership Main Office), had arrived in person to encourage Dutch recruitment. Although Mussert hoped his NSB would be recognized by the Germans as an autonomous organization, he – like Quisling in Norway – was unable to prevent his militant followers from enlisting directly in the SS. In September 1940 Hitler ignored his appeal for a measure of Dutch autonomy, simply declaring that '... in the Netherlands and Norway live the best representatives of the Germanic race'. In the eyes of Hitler and his Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, all 'Germanics' were potential cannon-fodder for Germany alone.

The 'Nordwest' Regiment

'Nordwest' was the third SS regiment (after 'Nordland' and 'Westland') formed by Himmler to accommodate racially 'Germanic' volunteers:

1 See MAA 524, *Norwegian Waffen-SS Legion, 1941–43*

Flemish, Dutch and Danish. Under the command of SS-Staf Otto Reich, the formation of (6.) SS-Freiwilligen Standarte 'Nordwest' began on 10 April 1941. By August a recruitment campaign had produced about 2,500 volunteers: 1,400 Dutch, 805 Flemings and 108 Danes. Training was carried out first in Hamburg (Langenhorn camp) and then at Radom in Poland, where the regiment was divided into two contingents; one, predominantly Dutch, was transferred to Krakow, while the other, mainly Flemish, remained at Radom. Himmler had initially intended that the 'Nordwest' Regt should be employed only as a security force in NW Europe, but the war in the East from June 1941 transformed his priorities. The formation of European volunteer Waffen-SS units for the Russian Front led to the disbandment of the 'Nordwest' that September, and the transfer of its volunteers into their respective national Legions.

EUROPA IS AANGETREDEN!
MET DE SS-STANDAARD WESTLAND IN DEN STRIJD
TEGEN HET BOLSJEWISME
AANMELDING: DEN HAAG, STADHOUDERSLAAN 132

Dutch recruiting poster for the SS-Standarte 'Westland', post-June 1941, presenting the war in the East as a crusade to save Christian Europe from Bolshevik barbarity. Alongside the Nazi flag are those of Finland, Italy, Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain (?), Norway, Romania and France.

The Germanic SS

Always attracted by romanticized pseudo-history, Himmler imagined the inclusion of the Netherlands, north-eastern France and Belgium in a new province of the Reich, to be called 'Burgundia'. To this end, he ordered the establishment in those countries of bodies connected directly to his overall Allgemeine-SS structure. On 11 September 1940, Mussert's NSB created the *Nederlandsche-SS* within its party organization.

From October 1942 the separate national SS structures were absorbed into a new 'Germanic SS' organization directly subordinate to Himmler's SS-FHA. A liaison office, the Germanische Leitstelle, established branches in Oslo, Copenhagen and The Hague to supervise propaganda and recruitment. Training camps were created at Sennheim in Alsace, Schooten in Belgium, Avegoor in the Netherlands, and Hovelte in Denmark, and an officers' Führerschule der Germanischen-SS at Hildesheim in Germany. The Dutch SS corps

Photo from a wartime leaflet showing Dutch volunteers in the SS-Standarte 'Nordwest' under training, spring 1941. They wear first-pattern Waffen-SS camouflage smocks and helmet covers, and man an MG34 squad machine gun.

Wartime postcard showing members of the *Germaansche-SS in Nederland* on parade. The cap badges are the 'wolf hook' above the death's-head; the collar patches (with a regimental number '2' on the right side), and the diamond-shaped 'SS' right sleeve patch, are edged with black/white twist. See also Plate B3.

was renamed the *Germaansche-SS en Nederland*, ceasing to be a paramilitary affiliate of the NSB and becoming an integral part of the SS, with volunteers thereafter swearing loyalty to Adolf Hitler alone. The *Germaansche-SS en Nederland* was an important manpower pool for the Dutch Waffen-SS combat units.

The Volunteer Netherlands Legion

The idea of forming a legion of Dutch volunteers to fight on the Russian Front was launched on 28 June 1941, with immediate support from the German authorities. The original cheerleader for the project, Arnold Meijer, soon abandoned it when he discovered that the SS would demand direct control. Mussert, by contrast, guaranteed the Germans his full support, since he saw in the new Legion the embryo for a new Dutch army. On 10 July 1941, Reichskommissar Seyss-Inquart officially announced the creation of the *Freiwilligen Legion Niederlande* (initially termed the *Freiwilligen Verband Niederlande*, both titles being in the German language). The commander chosen was LtGen H. A. Seyffardt, a former chief-of-staff of the Royal Dutch Army. The enlistment campaign was actively supported by Mussert, who invited all members of the NSB to set an example by signing up to join the 1,400 Dutch volunteers of the disbanded 'Nordwest' Regt in the new Legion. Many young Dutchmen did so, particularly members of the NSB party's WA

Swearing-in ceremony for Dutch volunteers, autumn 1941. On their all-field-grey Waffen-SS tunics they wear the first-pattern national sleeve shield high on the arm, and the Dutch-made *'Legion Niederlande'* cuffband – see photo page 47. (Courtesy Rene Chavez Collection)

militia. Some Flemish volunteers also preferred to join the Dutch rather than the Flemish Legion, and some immigrants of Asian origin from the Netherlands East Indies were also accepted. The officer cadre was drawn partly from Dutch officers already serving with the 'Westland' Regt, alongside many Germans.

In mid-October 1941 the volunteers were transferred to Arys in East Prussia (now Orzysz, Poland) to begin their training under German instructors. The regime was harsh, leading to immediate discontent and defections. The elderly LtGen Seyffardt resigned command when he belatedly realized that the Legion was to be simply a combat unit of the Waffen-SS lacking all national autonomy. While he retained the post of honorary commander-in-chief of the Legion, actual command passed to the German SS-Oberf (BrigGen) Otto Reich.

At the beginning of January 1942, the SS-Freiwilligen Legion Niederlande was officially declared ready for front-line service. It numbered some 3,000 men in all, the combat elements being organized in three infantry battalions each with four companies, plus 13th (Inf Gun) and 14th (Anti-Tank) companies.

Volunteer Legions-Sturmann displaying the 'wolf hook' right collar patch in its original vertical format. The *Waffenfarbe* piping of the black shoulder straps was in infantry white. (Wartime magazine *Fotonieuws*)

Legion order of battle, January 1942

Kommandeur: SS-Oberf Otto Reich
(HQ Co) Stabs Kompanie: Leg-Hstuf Eduard Voorwinden[2]
(Engineer) Pionier Zug: Leg-Hstuf Quintus De Veer
(Signals) Nachrichten Zug: SS-Ustuf Josef Werner
(Admin) Verwaltung: SS-Ostuf Hermann Lutgerd
(Ordnance) Zeug: SS-Ostuf Paul Dirk

I. Bataillon: SS-Stubaf Richard Pohle
1. Kompanie: SS-Ostuf Albert Buchner
2. Kompanie: SS-Hstuf Bernhard Frank
3. Kompanie: Leg-Ostuf Jacobus Bevort
4. Kompanie: Leg-Ostuf Rever Clijn

II. Bataillon: SS-Hstuf Alfred Reich
5. Kompanie: SS-Ostuf Wolfgang Vierweger
6. Kompanie: SS-Ustuf Josef Heinziger
7. Kompanie: SS-Hstuf Wilhelm Breimaier
8. Kompanie: SS-Ostuf Fritz Tillmann

III. Bataillon: SS-Hstuf Willi Breimaier
9. Kompanie: SS-Hstuf Joachim Stoige
10. Kompanie: Leg-Hstuf Eduard Voorwinden
11. Kompanie: SS-Ostuf Adolf Fritsche
12. Kompanie: SS-Ostuf Friedrich Neidlinger
13. Kompanie (Infanteriegeschütze): SS-Ostuf Heinrich Nikoleit
14. Kompanie (Panzerjäger): SS-Hstuf Kurt Otto

Dutch volunteer private training with the MG34; under magnification, the right collar patch is seen to bear the horizontal 'wolf hook' rather than the SS-runes. His tunic appears to be the German Army M1935 pattern with dark green collar facing; altered Dutch M1934 tunics are also seen in some photos. (Wartime magazine *Fotonieuws*)

2 The 'Germanic' legions from Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands and Flanders were not officially integrated into the Waffen-SS at this date but were defined as 'affiliated'. Consequently, foreign volunteers bore ranks prefixed with 'Legions-' rather than 'SS-'. For example, while a German SS captain bore the rank of SS-Hauptsturmführer, a Dutch volunteer captain was styled Legions-Hauptsturmführer.

EASTERN FRONT, 1942–1943

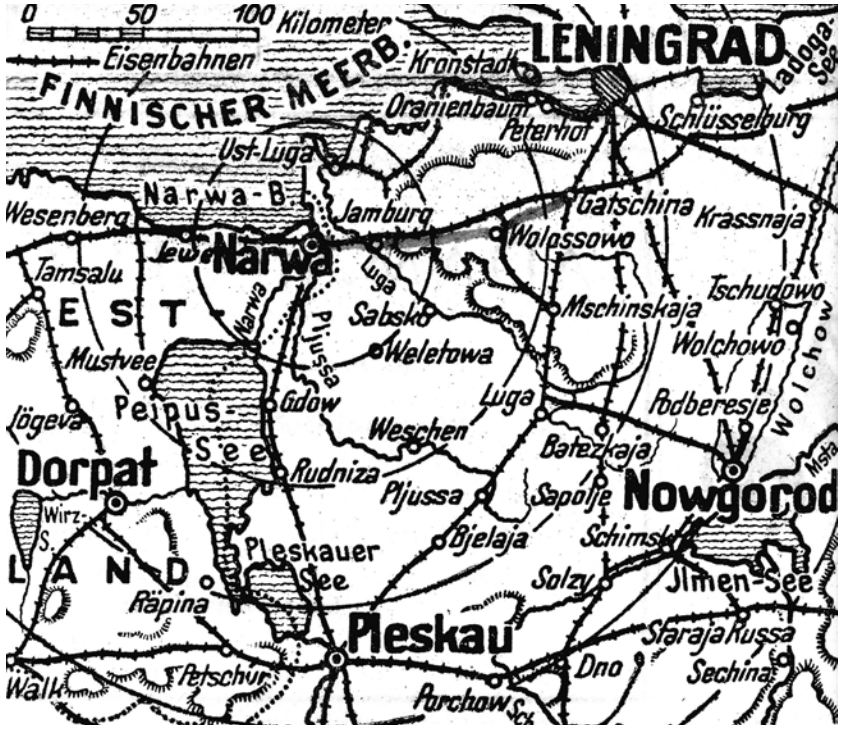
February 1942: a Legion officer wearing the long, thin-hooded German Army M1934 watchcoat (*Übermantel*) scanning the front line near Selo Gora, where the unit would fight its first actions. He stands between field positions built with earth and felled tree-trunks. (US NARA)

In mid-January 1942, the Dutch volunteers were transferred by sea from Gdansk in Poland to Libau in Latvia, and then by train to the east-facing Volkhov River front south-east of Leningrad, between Lake Ladoga in the north and Lake Ilmen in the south. Arriving just as the Soviet winter counteroffensive was hitting its stride, the Legion was deployed in snow-covered trenches on the west bank of the Volkhov near Selo Gora, south of Chudovo and north of Novgorod. They took over positions previously held by 90. Inf Regt of GenMaj Erich Jaschke's 20. Mot Inf Div, a formation of Eighteenth Army, and were soon incorporated into the so-called Kampfgruppe Jaschke.

Volkhov front, February–June 1942

On 10 February the Dutch Legion came under heavy artillery fire followed by direct infantry and tank attack. The forward positions were overrun, but German and Dutch troops carried out prompt counterattacks. The Soviet offensive continued until the end of February, but without achieving concrete results. The Legion was successfully committed to mopping up Soviet penetrations in the forest around the villages of Pjatilipy and Gorenka, north of Selo Gora, and also against enemy reconnaissance patrols and partisans.

After eliminating Soviet pockets on both sides of the railway line, the Legion was praised in the official Wehrmacht bulletin for the first time on 4 March 1942. For the rest of that month Soviet pressure continued to grow, and the beginnings of the spring thaw made living conditions even worse as the trenches filled with slushy mud. From 1 April SS-Ostubaf



This map from a wartime German magazine includes almost all the battlefieds of the Dutch volunteers, except Kurland. At right, north of Nowgorod (Novgorod) and south of Tschudovo (Chudovo) is the stretch of the Wolchow (Volkhov) River front where the Legion fought in February–June 1942. Just off the map, east of the Krassnaja rail junction north of Tchudovo, is Mga, where the anti-tank gunners distinguished themselves in January–February 1943; and below the 'L' of Leningrad is the Oranienbaum front, where the Red Army broke through. North-east of Narwa (Narva) is Jamburg on the Luga River, through which the Brigade retreated on its way to the Narva bridgehead for its greatest battle, in February–July 1944. The *Tannenbergstellung* was just above the first 'a' in Narwa. Low left is the Dorpat (Tartu) line between Lakes Wirz and Peipus, briefly held by Kampfgruppe Wagner in August 1944.

MG34 position in the Dutch sector near Selo Gora on the Volkhov front. This volunteer wears a white cloth cover on his helmet, though most photos show white-painted helmets. The coat is made of thin white cloth, for camuflage only, and gave no extra protection. (Wartime magazine *Fotonieuws*)

Arved Theuermann took over command in the temporary absence of SS-Oberf Reich, and the Dutch continued to repulse attacks on the village of Gusi throughout that month.

The renewal of German offensive action eliminated the 'Volkhov pocket', formed from 13 January when the Soviet Gen Andrei Vlasov's Second Shock Army and parts of Fifty-Second and Fifty-Ninth armies had crossed the river in an attempt to reach besieged Leningrad. Eventually all these forces were destroyed, with Soviet losses of more than 100,000 dead and wounded, and tens of thousands taken prisoner. The Dutch were credited with capturing more than 3,000 prisoners (including, famously, Gen Vlasov himself) plus large quantities of weapons, ammunition and equipment. Fighting in the Selo Gora area continued until June 1942, after which the Legion was relieved from the front line. Dutch volunteers were awarded 32 Iron Crosses 1st Class and 158 2nd Class for their conduct in these battles.

Volkhov front, late March 1942: as soon as the snow began to melt, the German lines were reduced to a slushy swamp. (US NARA)

First battle of Lake Ladoga, September–December 1942

In June 1942 the Dutch Legion was subordinated tactically to the 2. SS-Infanterie Brigade commanded by SS-Brigaf (MajGen) Gottfried Klingemann.[3] On 15 July, SS-Ostubaf (Maj) Josef Fitzthum took over command of the Legion. Once sweeps in the Volkhov area had been completed, the Dutch were deployed to keep watch over the Leningrad–Novgorod railway line, along with the 285. Sicherungs (Security) Division.

3 Originally a motorized security brigade of former *Totenkopf* units active in the rear of Eighteenth Army, 2. SS-Inf Bde was later committed to front-line fighting. Disbanded in December 1941, in June 1942 it was reorganized by integrating the Dutch, Norwegian and Flemish Legions, and several Latvian volunteer battalions.

The bitter winter conditions soon saw the first Dutch frostbite casualties on their way to the field hospitals, and in early February 1942 Mussert and Zondervan (centre, uniformed as a Legions-Untersturmführer), the leaders of the NSB and WA respectively, visited the front bringing gift packages and winter clothing. During the visit a ceremony was organized during which the first Iron Crosses were presented to Dutch volunteers who had distinguished themselves. The officer on the left, wearing a field cap, is Leg-Hstuf Quintus De Veer, who would later command II Abt / SS-Art Regt 54 of the 'Nederland' Brigade. (US NARA)

At the end of July, still with 2. SS-Inf Bde, they were transferred north to take part in the Leningrad siege operations. On 24 July 1942 the Legion had only about 600 men still fit for combat: 16 officers, 79 NCOs and 478 rankers.

After about a month of relative calm in the trenches around Leningrad, the Legion was withdrawn to prepare for its part in a planned final assault on the city, Operation 'Nordlicht' ('North Light'). The start of this offensive was set for 14 August, but the Red Army pre-empted it by a massive counteroffensive south of Lake Ladoga. The Dutch Legion was among the units once again transferred south of Leningrad, this time to hold off Soviet attacks in the area of Krasnoje Selo. The ensuing encounters passed into history as the 'first battle of Lake Ladoga'.

Beginning on 2 September 1942, an independent battle-group was formed within 2. SS-Inf Bde; taking the name of its commander, SS-Ostubaf Fitzthum, it consisted of the Dutch Legion, Norwegian Legion, and the 19th and 20th Latvian battalions, which would all see bitter defensive fighting until December 1942. On 4 December the Dutch volunteers of I Bn were struck by some 600 Soviet infantry, many of whom penetrated their front. The Kampfgruppe's counterattack by Norwegian and Dutch units to re-establish the former defensive line killed about 350 Soviet soldiers and took 42 prisoners, for own losses of 30 killed, 66 wounded and three missing

Second battle of Lake Ladoga, January–February 1943

On 12 January 1943 the Soviets launched yet another offensive, attacking both eastwards from the Leningrad enclave and westwards south of Lake Ladoga, and on 18 January this Operation *Iskra* ('Spark') succeeded in punching a corridor through the Leningrad siege lines. The Norwegian and Dutch volunteers had to repel numerous Soviet armoured attacks, during which the anti-tank companies were particularly hard-pressed.

The Dutch volunteers being transferred to new positions to protect the Leningrad–Novgorod railway line in June 1942, as part of the motorized 2. SS-Infanterie Brigade. (US NARA)

Legion rifleman in a typical log-revetted field position in summer 1942. (US NARA)

From 15 January, Dutch and Norwegian AT elements had been detached to stiffen the German 16. Polizei Schützen Regt south-east of Schlüsselburg at the south-west tip of Lake Ladoga. During the first defensive battles the Dutch AT company suffered heavy losses, so reinforcements were requested from other companies. A 19-year-old volunteer, Gerardus Mooyman, who had originally been trained as an anti-tank gunner, was one of the first to be transferred to 14. Panzerjäger Kompanie, as a gun commander (Geschutzführer) in a position east of Mga.

At dawn on 31 January the German positions came under machine-gun fire, and Mooyman soon spotted about a company of Soviet tanks, backed by infantry, approaching through the snow on a narrow front confined by forest. He fired on the first tank and set it ablaze, and quickly hit a second. Under return fire from the infantry, his PaK 97/38 then jammed with a round in the breech, but the gunner, Ruiter, eventually freed it after dangerously belabouring it with a heavy branch. Resuming fire, Mooyman's crew destroyed four more tanks and damaged a further four. The Soviet infantry fell back, and the only two tanks to penetrate the Dutch positions were quickly knocked out with grenades. For this action, Mooyman was awarded the Iron Cross 2nd Class. Three days later he was awarded the 1st Class for inspirational conduct which stiffened wavering German infantry under renewed attack.

During further armoured attacks on 13 February, the Dutch AT gunners destroyed six tanks and damaged two others. At about 1100hrs another attack was made by 20 tanks, of which Mooyman's crew set six on fire in quick succession, and damaged others. In all, the four Dutch AT guns had so far destroyed a total of 15 tanks, of which 13 were credited to Mooyman's crew. On the evening of 13 February GenLt Erwin Sander, commander of 170. Inf Div, wrote up a citation for the award of the Knight's Cross to Mooyman (the first to a non-German volunteer), which was endorsed by

Bivouac tents buttoned together from each man's *Zeltbahn* or shelter-quarter, printed with the Waffen-SS camouflage pattern. Note the ankle boots that replaced the classic 'marching boots'. The soldier in the background has shrouded his head with mosquito netting; insects plagued troops on the northern sector of the Russian Front in summertime. (US NARA)

After distinguishing himself in the 'second battle of Lake Ladoga' in February 1943, Leg-Stmn Gerardus Mooyman poses displaying his Knight's Cross and two grades of Iron Cross. His anti-tank gun, which seems to be named 'Erta', should have 17 to 20 'kill' rings painted round the barrel, which has been left in its dark grey factory finish. It is one of thousands of PaK 97/38s – modified 75mm French M1897 guns mounted on the split-trail carriage of the 5cm PaK 38 – which were used by the Wehrmacht. In another posed photo of Mooyman with his gun and crew he wears a collarless white snow-camouflage coat over his uniform, and a Russian fur cap with deep, thick, fold-up flaps. (US NARA)

SS-Brigaf Fritz von Scholz, commanding 2. SS-Inf Bde – and the next day Mooyman destroyed another three tanks, bringing his total score to 20.

During the following three days Soviet activity against the Schlüsselburg corridor was limited to patrols and shelling. Mooyman's gun hit two more tanks on 22 February, their last action before the Dutch were withdrawn from that sector. Mooyman was decorated with his Knight's Cross on 26 February by Gen Johann Sinnhuber, commanding 28. Jäger Div, and soon afterwards he was sent home on leave, during which he was publicized as an exemplary hero of the Dutch Legion.

FROM LEGION TO BRIGADE

Reichsführer-SS Himmler – impressed by the performance of the Dutch, Norwegian, Flemish and Danish volunteer legions in Russia – now planned to absorb their veterans into new formations, as full members of the Waffen-SS. This would allow the creation of a III. (germanische) SS-Panzer Korps built around the soon-to-be-armoured 5. SS-Pz Div 'Wiking', which itself included some foreign troops. The latter's commander, SS-Gruf (LtGen) Felix Steiner, would be appointed to command the new corps.

On 10 February 1943, the SS-FHA ordered the withdrawal from the front of the four national legions – by now greatly weakened – for rest and reassignment as the basis for new formations. On 11 February, Himmler noted that the first new European division, later numbered 11., was to be formed around three new SS regiments: 'Nederland', 'Danmark' and 'Norge'. The divisional title 'Nordland' was proposed, but the Dutch nationalist leader Mussert opposed the use of this purely Scandinavian-sounding name, which would seemingly ignore the Dutch component. In the end, Himmler agreed to create an exclusively Dutch SS formation alongside the 11. 'Nordland' Div, and Hitler retrospectively endorsed the plan on 19 July 1943.

Formation, summer 1943

On 27 April 1943 the surviving Dutch volunteers were withdrawn from the front, and in early May they were transferred to a camp near Sonnenberg in Thuringia, where the Legion was officially redesignated as SS-Freiwilligen Panzergrenadier Brigade 'Nederland'. While the new component units were created, an increased effort was made to attract Dutch recruits. Of those who applied, only some 3,000 passed the medical, to join some 2,000 already serving – either Dutch Legion veterans, or Dutch members of other German military and paramilitary organizations. While falling well short of the required manning levels for a division (16,000–18,000 men), this enabled the formation of a brigade. During July and August formation of two three-battalion regiments began, initially designated as SS-Frw PzGren Regts 1 and 2, both suffixed 'Nederland'; most veterans of the Dutch Legion were posted into the 1st Regiment. In October 1943 the regiments were respectively awarded the honour-titles 'General Seyffardt' (after the assassinated former commander), and 'De Ruiter' (after Michiel De Ruyter, the great Dutch admiral of the 17th-century Anglo-Dutch wars).

SS-Oberf Jürgen Wagner. Born in Strasbourg in German-occupied Alsace in 1901, this former commander of the 'Germania' Regt in the SS-Div 'Wiking' took over the new 'Nederland' Brigade in spring 1943 while it was forming in Germany, and, apart from a brief spell in command of 4. SS-Polizei PzGren Div in spring 1944, he would lead it and the subsequent 23. SS-Frw PzGren Div 'Nederland' until the end of the war. (US NARA)

The brigade was organized around two nominally armoured infantry (but mostly motorized) regiments and an artillery regiment. It also included a reconnaissance company, an engineer company and an anti-tank battalion partly equipped with Sturmgeschutz III self-propelled assault guns. In fact, the artillery and service units were not actually formed for several months. The commander was SS-Oberf Jürgen Wagner, formerly commander of the 'Germania' Regt in the 'Wiking' Division.

Croatia, September 1943–January 1944

The brigade was assigned to Gen Steiner's III. SS-Pz Korps, whose units began to be transferred to Croatia in early September 1943. The Dutch continued their training north of Zagreb, where they received some 1,500 reinforcements; some of these were Dutch veterans from the 'Wiking' Div, and some ethnic German 'Volksdeutschen' from Romania. The units of III. SS-Pz Korps were initially engaged in disarming Italian troops left in limbo by Italy's capitulation to the Allies on 8 September, but the Dutch volunteers also saw some action against Tito's communist Partisans.

On 30 November 1943 the SS-FHA assigned new numbers to both infantry regiments: Regt 1 'General Seyffardt' became Regt 45, and Regt 2 'De Ruiter' became Regt 46. Almost immediately these were changed yet again, to 48 and 49 respectively. Lack of manpower limited both regiments to two battalions only. On the eve of its departure for the Russian Front the total (not the combat) strength of what was now designated 4. SS-Frw PzGren Bde 'Nederland' was recorded as 9,342 all ranks.

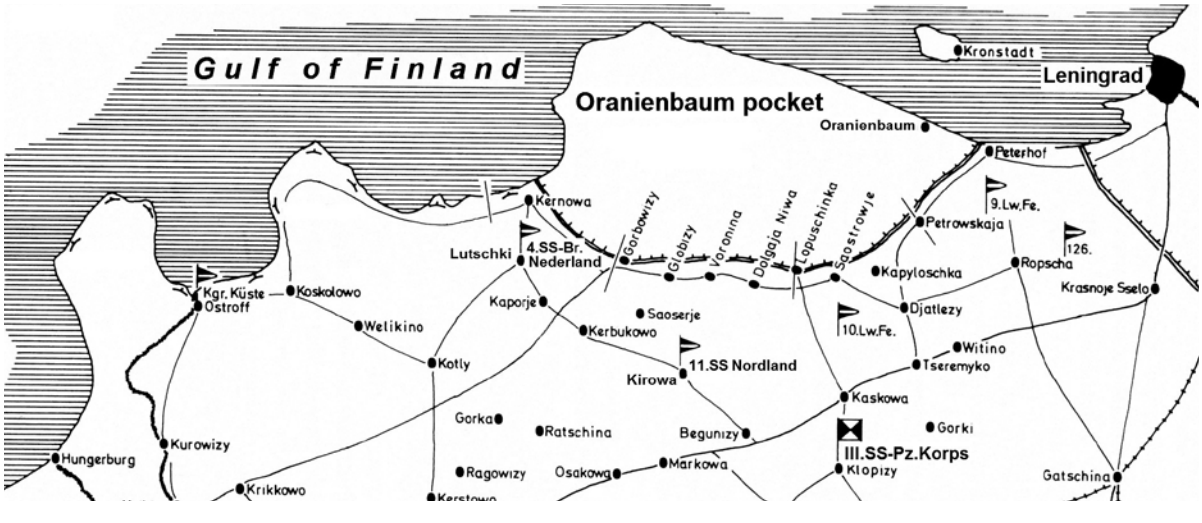
Brigade order of battle, January 1944

Brigadestab (SS-Oberf Jürgen Wagner)
SS-Frw PzGren Regt 48 'General Seyffardt' (SS-Ostubaf Wolfgang Jörchel)
Stab und Stabskompanie
I. Bataillon, 1.–4. Kompanie; II. Bataillon, 5.–8. Kompanie
SS-Frw PzGren Regt 49 'De Ruiter' (SS-Ostubaf Hans Collani)
(*as Regt 48*)
SS-Frw Artillerie Regt 54 (SS-Ostubaf Kurt Brasack)
Stab, I. Abteilung, II. Abteilung (*regt formed March 1944*)
(Recce) SS-Pz Aufklärungs Kompanie 54 (SS-Ostuf Erich Kuhne)
(Anti-tank) SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 54 (SS-Stubaf Knud Schock)
(Engineer) SS-Pionier Bataillon 54 (SS-Stubaf Ernst Wendland)
(Signals) SS-Nachrichten Kompanie 54 (SS-Hstuf Wilhelm Thissen)
(Anti-aircraft) SS-Flak Kompanie 54 (SS-Ustuf Cornelius Nieuwendijk-Hoek)
(Replacement training) SS-Feldersatz Btl 54: Stab, 1.–5. Kompanie
(Medical) SS-Sanitäts Kompanie 54
(Admin) SS-Wirtschafts Kompanie 54
(Supply) SS-Nachschuß Truppen 54

RETURN TO THE EASTERN FRONT, 1944

Oranienbaum front

The first units of the 'Nederland' Bde arrived on the Oranienbaum front on 28 December 1943. The brigade still lacked its artillery and anti-aircraft guns, and the reconnaissance company had few motor vehicles. General Steiner's corps was subordinated to Eighteenth Army, whose sector ran from the Gulf of Finland coast west of Leningrad south-eastwards to Lake Ilmen. The Germanic units were deployed south-west of the city facing the Soviet salient at Oranienbaum. Here they joined a motley variety of units which were awaiting an expected Soviet



Sketch map of part of German 18. Armee deployments south-west of Leningrad in January 1944. The 4. SS-Brigade 'Nederland' holds the western sector of the front facing the Oranienbaum pocket, from the coast east of Kernowa to Gorbowizy (sic). On its right is 11. SS-Div 'Nordland', eastwards to Lopuschinka; then 10. Luftwaffe Feld Div as far as Petrowskaja; then 9. Lw Feld Div up to the coast at Peterhof. The latter formations were weak in artillery and transport, and were in the throes of being reorganized under Army control; they quickly collapsed in the face of the Soviet offensive on 14 January. (Author's map)

offensive, including Kriegsmarine coastal artillery, the Luftwaffe's 9. and 10. Feld-Divisionen, Estonian border battalions and a Kampfgruppe of 4. SS-Polizei PzGren Division. On their side, the Soviet Second Shock Army had two army corps in the Oranienbaum pocket, with nine Guards divisions, three tank brigades and a coastal brigade.

General Steiner decided to deploy the Dutch brigade on his left, to relieve SS-Stubaf Wilhelm Bock's weak SS-Polizei battle-group. At the beginning of the new year the Dutch took over the entire SS-Polizei Kampfgruppe sector, but in the absence of their own artillery the SS-Polizei artillery battalion remained in the line. Regt 49 'De Ruiter' took up positions to the east and Regt 48 'General Seyffardt' to the west. SS-Panzerjäger Abt 54 finally received its towed and SP guns. Meanwhile, the massing of Soviet troops along both the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts was all too clear.

German troops falling back from the Oranienbaum front along a partly frozen stream, January 1944, with a knocked-out Soviet T-34 in the foreground. (US NARA)

The Soviet January offensive

On 14 January 1944, Soviet forces of the 2nd Baltic Front launched offensives from the east, while attackers from the Oranienbaum salient overran the Luftwaffe field divisions. Despite desperate counterattacks by units of 'Nederland' and 'Nordland', the whole line buckled under the pressure and two Soviet pincers closed at Ropscha, near Krasnoye Sselo. From there the combined forces thrust south-westwards towards Jamburg on the Luga River, threatening to cut off the defenders of the Oranienbaum front. When the Soviet 43rd and 122nd Rifle Corps broke through the third German defensive line, Steiner organized a counterattack covered by artillery. To take part in this, the Dutch Bde sent Kampfgruppe Rühle led by SS-Hstuf Hans-Joachim Rühle von Lilienstern, consisting of three companies from I. / SS-Regt 48 'General Seyffardt' and later two from SS-Pionier Btl 54, which moved to Kaporje and, on 20 January, was subordinated to 10. Luftwaffe Feld-Division. Meanwhile, other units of SS-Regt 48 were temporarily transferred to the command of 11. SS-Frw PzGren Div 'Nordland'.

On the night of 22/23 January the Dutch battle-group threw back repeated attacks on their positions each side of the village of Witino, and was led in fierce counterattacks by its commander in person. On 25 January, survivors of the overrun I. / SS-Regt 24 'Danmark' from the 'Nordland' Div fought their way through to Witino, and were deployed south of the village. The wounded SS-Hstuf Rühle von Lilienstern held these positions until 27 January, to cover the retreat of other units westwards to Jamburg. Already awarded the Iron Cross 1st Class on 22 January, the battle-group commander was awarded the Knight's Cross on 12 February. He and his men were singled out in a Korps order of the day by SS-Gruf Steiner: 'I wish to express my special appreciation for the excellent work done by Kampfgruppe Rühle, of the SS Nederland Brigade. I feel honoured to have these men under my command.'

Retreat to the Luga

The Dutch units began their withdrawal to the Luga River through snowbound forests on 28 January, harassed by Soviet artillery and pursued by units of the Forty-Seventh Army. Major Shock's AT battalion reinforced the rearguard with its StuGs before pulling back south towards Jamburg; Lt Kuhne's recce company covered the flanks and maintained contact between units. The rearguard of SS-Reg 49 'De Ruiter' was attacked near Kotly, but a lone Flak gun from the regiment's 14. Kompanie managed to hold open the road to the west. As soon as the last battle-group crossed the Luga at Keikino, the Dutch Bde took up defensive positions on the east bank around that town, and engineers blew a bridge north of Padoga to deny the Krikkowo–Jamburg road to heavy vehicles. The last units of SS-Regt 48 'General Seyffardt' crossed the Luga on 30 January.

By the end of January, III. SS-Pz Korps was established along a new defensive line following the course of the Luga River, with a bridgehead at Keikino. Gen Walter Model, commanding Army Group North, ordered Gen Steiner to hold it for as long as possible to cover other retreating units and to shield the main supply route along the Leningrad–Jamburg railway. Steiner had his doubts, knowing that Soviet Eighth Army elements had already crossed the Luga further south and were approaching Lake Peipus (see map page 8).

Beginning on 31 January, the Soviets defied expectations by infiltrating first small parties, then whole units between Kurowizy and the coast of the Gulf of Finland at Hungerburg, to threaten the line of the Narva River. The NCO training company attached to SS-Regt 48 was given the impossible mission of defending about 20km (12.5 miles) of trackless forest and swamp at this northern end of the defensive line, and was forced back with 50 per cent casualties. Another dangerous Soviet penetration at Pulkowo was halted by SS-Ostuf Eugen Deck's 6. Kompanie / SS-Regt 49. Further to the south, also on 31 January, the Soviets attacked the 'Nordland' Div's SS-Regt 23 'Norge' in the Jamburg bridgehead, and then brought pressure on positions held by SS-Regt 24 'Danmark' near Padoga. Jamburg was abandoned on 1 February, and III. SS-Pz Korps' artillery was pulled back across the Narva River.

NARVA

As early as September 1943 the German High Command had ordered construction of defences that exploited the natural features of the Narva and Velikaya rivers, and lakes Peipus and Pskov, along the historical frontier between Russia and Estonia. However, the work was far from complete when the units of the 'Nordland' Div and 'Nederland' Bde began their withdrawal to this new 'Panther Line'.

The medieval city of Narva lay only about 10km (6 miles) inland from the Baltic Sea coast, straddling the Narva River. On the west bank was the Teutonic Knights' castle of Hermannsburg, immediately faced on the east bank by the old Russian fortress of Ivangorod.

Armee-Abteilung Narwa

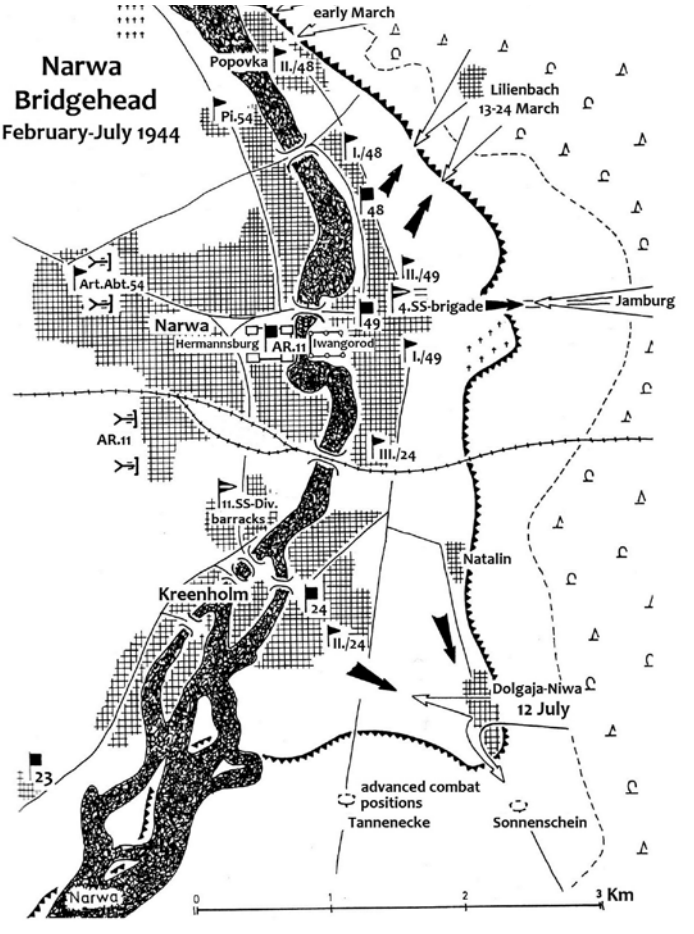
To reinforce Narva, Hitler ordered the dispatch of all available forces; German Army, Navy and Air Force units would fight alongside Estonians

and, above all, European Waffen-SS volunteers, whose part in the defensive battle would be emphasized by German propaganda.

On 4 February, III. SS-Pz Korps was detached from Eighteenth Army and subordinated directly to Army Group North. On 23 February, the creation of Armee-Abteilung Narwa (GenLt Johannes Friessner) was announced, to control all units north of Lake Peipus. Army Group North ordered the deployment of its assets as follows: III. SS-Pz Korps (SS-Gruf Steiner) north of Narva city and in the bridgehead on the east bank of the river; XXXXII Armee Korps (Gen Karl von Oven) at the bridgehead of Auvere south of the city; and XXVI Armee Korps (Gen Anton Grasser) in the sector between the Auvere bridgehead and Lake Peipus. Facing them were, from north to south, the Soviet Forty-Seventh and Eighth armies, with Second Shock Army in support to the east.

In the eastern bridgehead (see maps, here and page 19), the 'Nederland' Bde (which received 482 reinforcements from a disbanded Luftwaffe Feld-Division) held the northern area between Popovka and Lilienbach, with 'General Seyffardt' around and south of Popovka, and 'De Ruiter' from Lilienbach down to Ivangorod and the Jamburg road. The 'Nordland' Div (which received 710 Luftwaffe reinforcements) had its SS-Regt 24 'Danmark' in the front line to the south in front of Kreenholm. Armoured support was provided by 'Nordland's' 1. / SS-Pz Abt 11 'Hermann von Salza', plus the Tiger tanks of 2. / schwere Pz Abt 502. Also on the west bank were I. / SS-Art Regt 54 (SS-Stubaf Josef Rüschoff) and 'Nordland's' SS-Art Regt 11, both of which were assigned to provide fire support to the Dutch Brigade.

(*Note:* from this point on, space dictates that only the main events of the long and complex battle can be mentioned.)



Sketch map of Narva city and the bridgehead, February–July 1944, with deployments of the 'Nederland' Bde and 'Nordland' Div; some major Soviet attack phases in March and July are marked as open arrows. To the south, dense forest and swamps stretching down to Lake Peipus hindered Soviet operations. Note, spelling uses the German 'w' for 'v'. (Author's map)

Operations, February–July 1944

On the night 2/3 February the Dutch were among the units struck by a series of Soviet attacks, but held their positions. Two days later the entire Narva front was subjected to heavy artillery and air bombardments followed by infantry and tank attacks. Their repulse gave opportunities for engineers to continue strengthening the defences.

Ssivertsi On 11 February, Soviet attacks north of the bridgehead, between Riigi and Ssivertsi, managing to break through, allowing some 3,000 infantry to establish a western bridgehead of their own. While Kampfgruppe Wengler of 227. Inf Div struggled to contain this dangerous

Panzergrenadiers of the Dutch brigade in Narva, February 1944. This photo shows mixed use of (left & centre) the thin white snow-camouflage 'shell' intended to be worn over the Waffen-SS M1942 long grey hooded parka, and (right) the M1943 padded reversible winter uniform. Note (left) the felt winter boots. (US NARA)

penetration only about 1km (0.6 miles) north-west of Narva, SS-Hstuf Günther Wanhöfer's Dutch engineers were sent up in reinforcement, with a Kampfgruppe led by SS-Stubaf Albrecht Krügel, commander of 'Nordland's' II. / SS-Regt 23 'Norge'. As soon as they reached Ssivertsi the reinforcements came under heavy shelling from the east bank, quickly followed by a compact mass of Soviet infantry crossing the frozen river to hurl themselves against the 'Nederland' and 'Nordland' engineers defending Ssivertsi cemetery. In bitter hand-to-hand combat among the gravestones, the cemetery changed hands several times.

During a major counterattack which he led with his 14 StuG III assault guns on the night of 12/13 February, SS-Stubaf Schock of 'Nederland's' SS-PzJäg Abt 54 was killed while supporting Kampfgruppe Krügel. The force suffered heavy losses to Soviet anti-tank guns and artillery, but infantry and sappers finally recaptured the whole of Ssivertsi. Command of the anti-tank battalion passed to SS-Hstuf Paul Krauss.

Second half of February 1944 Repeated heavy air raids and artillery bombardments caused many casualties and destroyed much equipment. Over the course of two nights and one day Narva city was reduced to heaps of rubble, with little except the two medieval citadels left standing, and in the south units of SS-Regt 24 'Danmark' suffered badly. The Red Army then resumed tank and infantry assaults on the Dutch-held northern suburbs, and for lack of AT guns Lilienbach was temporarily lost before a counterattack led by 'Nordland' units restored a defensive line.

First half of March 1944 At dawn on 7 March the Soviets renewed their attacks, the greatest weight falling on the two battalions of SS-Regt 48 'General Seyffardt' in the north around Popovka, where SS-Stubaf Jörchel had to commit all his reserves. Soviet infantry broke through at Popovka, Telliskivi and Lilienbach, but were halted by the heavy machine guns and mortars in the second line, while artillery and 88mm Flak guns destroyed all the supporting Soviet tanks. The fierce fighting left piles of enemy corpses between the first and second defensive lines, but despite renewed assaults the Dutch grenadiers held their positions and recaptured ground by counterattacks. The Red Army also achieved a penetration at Lilienbach, where SS-Regt 49 'De Ruiter' had to be reinforced by the remnants of the Danish Kampfgruppe Thöny and 9. / SS-Regt 24 'Danmark'. Fighting here continued for two days, at serious cost.

Stalemated in the north, the Soviets shifted their axis of attack to the south, immediately in front of the 'Nederland' Bde command post just north-east of Ivangorod. SS-Oberf Wagner co-ordinated the movements of reserves, and SS-Ostuf Rott's PzKw V Panther tanks of 1. / SS-Pz Abt 11 'Hermann von Salza' played a major role in halting the attack.

Under continual pressure, particularly from Soviet artillery, it was decided to abandon the exposed Lilienbach positions, and the Dutch withdrew to an area known as 'the Devil's Meadow' (*Teufelwiese,* in German). There they were attacked while still setting up their new positions on the night of 13/14 March. The commander of

Waffen-SS engineer at Narva preparing what appear to be German S-mines. The combat engineers of both 'Nederland' and 'Nordland' were very heavily engaged throughout the six-month battle, fighting as infantry as well as employing their specialist equipment and skills. This sapper wears the M1943 visored 'universal field cap', and the hooded overjacket and trousers of the excellent M1943 padded, reversible-camouflage *Wintertarnanzug*. Both white-painted and white-covered helmets are seen in photos. (US NARA)

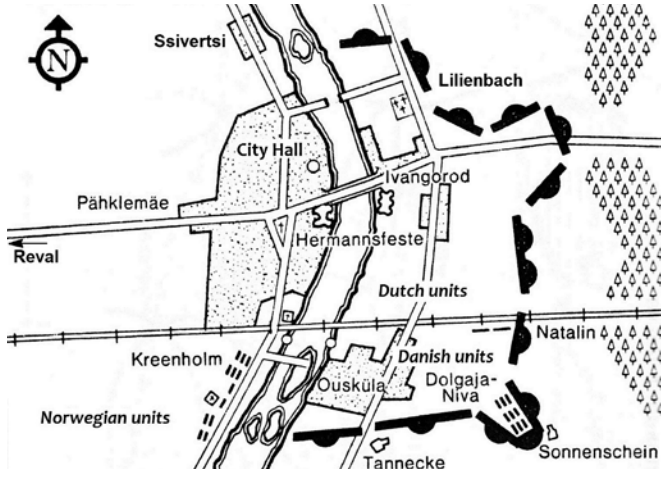
II. / SS-Regt 49 'De Ruiter', SS-Hstuf Walter Diener, was killed and a company commander wounded, but 7. Kompanie's SS-Ostuf Helmut Scholz led a handful of men in a counterattack which threw the enemy back. The valour of the Dutch volunteers was once again praised in the OKW report of 15 March, and a couple of days later SS-Hstuf Karl-Heinz Frühauf succeeded to command of II. / SS-Regt 49.

Second half of March 1944 On 22 March, artillery fire pulverized the positions of SS-Ostuf Helmut Hirt's 5. / SS-Regt 49 on the Devil's Meadow in preparation for an infantry attack. SS-Hstuf Frühauf collected every man who was available and led a counterattack which eventually retook all of the lost positions. For this action the battalion commander was awarded the Knight's Cross.

***Festung Narwa*, March–May 1944** On 23 March, Hitler officially proclaimed Narva to be a 'fortress city', whose garrison must defend their positions at all costs. The 'Nordland' Div and 'Nederland' Bde had already paid a high price in blood, suffering overall losses of about 7,500 men since the beginning of December 1943. As of 13 April, 'Nederland's' casualties amounted to 87 officers dead, wounded and missing, 502 NCOs and 3,139 rankers, leaving a strength of 6,305 all ranks.

With the arrival of the spring thaw the front stabilized during April and May, except for long-distance artillery duels and patrol clashes. On 20 April, the commander of the 'Nederland' Bde and of 'Fortress Narva', Jürgen Wagner, was promoted to the rank of SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor der Waffen-SS. On the 21st, the commander of SS-Regt 48 'General Seyffardt', SS-Ostubaf Wolfgang Jörchel, was awarded the Knight's Cross to mark the exemplary performance of his unit. On the 24th, four other officers of the brigade were awarded the German Cross in Gold.

Sketch map of the centre of Narva city and the bridgehead, with the outlying positions at Ssivertsi, Lilienbach and Sonnenschein. Note: Reval = Tallinn, and the Hermannsfeste = the Hermannsburg. (Author's map)



Looking from the west to the east bank of the Narva River in the centre of the city, with the still-standing medieval Ivangorod fortress in the right background; the two soldiers wear the *Winteranzug* both white-side-out and camouflage-side-out. The newly rebuilt bridge is clearly named the 'Bunse-Brücke', after the commander of the 'Nordland' Div's engineer battalion. From August to November 1944 SS-Ostubaf Fritz Bunse would command SS-Frw PzGren Regt 49 'De Ruiter'. (US NARA)

In early May, SS-Ostubaf Jörchel handed over command of the 'General Seyffardt' to SS-Stubaf Herbert Garthe. In the weeks that followed the defensive battles along the entire length of the front increased in intensity, but the Red Army were unable to make any gains worthy of note. On 20 May, command of the brigade's artillery regiment passed to SS-Stubaf Wilhelm Schlüter.

June 1944 On 12 June a massive new Soviet offensive was launched all along the Panther Line. The shelling of the northern part of the bridgehead kept the Dutch in their bunkers, but proved to be a diversion; at about 1615hrs Soviet assaults hit the southern sector, achieving penetrations at Dolgaja-Niva, and about an hour later the reserves were committed. Support was provided by artillery from 'Nordland' and 'Nederland' as well as by a handful of StuG assault guns. At 1906hrs SS-Brigaf Wagner learned that the south-easternmost outpost at Sonnenschein had fallen, but a new counterattack was underway by 2135 hours. Other enemy thrusts north of Sonnenschein were repulsed by machine gun and Panzerfaust teams, and by 2335hrs Sonnenschein was back in German hands.

On 19 June a number of assault guns were transferred from 'Nederland' to 'Nordland', leaving the Dutch with only ten StuGs and two attached PzKw V tanks. It was slight compensation that the initial elements of II. / SS-Polizei Art Regt 4 finally arrived, with a few light howitzers (*leichte Feldhaubitze 18*) and three quad-20mm Flakvierling AA guns.

The end of the bridgehead, July 1944 In early July, command of SS-Regt 48 'General Seyffardt' passed to SS-Ostubaf Richard Benner from 6. SS-Gebirgs Div 'Nord'. Units of 'Nederland' and 'Nordland' were again engaged in repelling attacks around Dolgaja-Niva. On 8 July the fighting lasted until late at night, costing 'General Seyffardt' and 'Danmark' serious losses.

On 11 July, attacks by the Soviet 2nd Baltic Front forced the southern wing of Eighteenth Army to fall back westwards, and III. SS-Pz Korps received the order to pull back about 20km (12.5 miles) from Narva to a new defensive position designated the 'Tannenbergstellung', along the Narva–Riga road. On 19 July, the Korps commander once again praised the Dutch volunteers: 'The exceptional behaviour of the troops and the strong leadership of the "Nederland" Brigade commanders deserve limitless recognition.' Unavoidably, the dangerous and time-consuming withdrawal operation required the deployment of rearguard units to cover the retreat of others, and the Dutch volunteers were among those given this sacrificial role in the bridgehead.

They were reinforced by other units, including Estonians of II. / Waffen-Gren Regt 47 (SS-Stubaf Alfons Rebane) plus an AT platoon, both from 20. Waffen-Gren Div der SS, and a coastal artillery detachment. Their mission was defence of the northern sector, from the centre of Narva up to Hungerburg on the Baltic coast. To their south were units from 'Nordland' including part of SS-Pz Abt 11 'Hermann von Salza', the Gruppe Riipalu (the staff of the Estonian Waffen-Gren Regt 45) and a section from Waffen-PzJg Abt 20, plus the reinforced 5. Kompanie of

SS-Regt 48 'General Seyffardt'. Other III. SS-Pz Korps units remained in the city itself.

On 24 July, the inevitable Soviet barrage heralded renewed assaults, and shortly afterwards the Dutch Bde's SS-Pionier Btl 54 (SS-Hstuf Wanhöfer) blew all the river bridges. (Wanhöfer would be awarded the Knight's Cross on 27 August 1944.) On 25 July, when Soviet air raids hit what was left of the city, the 'General Seyffardt' Regt, II. / 'De Ruiter' and 7. / 'Danmark' were still in Narva, with the forward observers for the Korps artillery that was being established further west.

March 1944: photographed unscrewing the safety cap from a stick-grenade in a trench in the Narva bridgehead, this volunteer wears the Waffen-SS M1942 long grey padded parka with a fur-lined hood. (US NARA)

Dutch withdrawal

At about 1050hrs on 25 July, SS-Brigaf Wagner was informed that the Red Army were pushing back the Estonian 20. Waffen-Gren Div der SS around Vasa north of Narva. To plug this dangerous gap, he sent elements of 'General Seyffardt' and I. / 'De Ruiter', along with Army units. When the rest of Wagner's command (II. / 'De Ruiter'; the bulk of 'General Seyffardt', SS-PzJg Abt 54, plus 7. / 'Danmark' and the Estonian Btl Rebane) finally began to withdraw westwards, they would soon find their route blocked by Soviet units advancing from Vanaküla.

The withdrawal to the Tannenberg position had been planned by phases, via various intermediate positions, with artillery support from higher echelons to the west; 'General Seyffardt' had the Btl Rebane on its left, and on its right II. / 'De Ruiter'. SS-Ostubaf Benner had taken regimental command of 'General Seyffardt' only a couple of weeks previously; his experience with the 'Nord' Div on the Finnish front had not prepared him for such a critical and fast-moving situation, and co-ordination between the units and with headquarters was poor.

Benner would waste precious time deciding whether to proceed along the road west from Narva to the Estonian capital Tallinn (Reval, in German), or along the railway line, which delayed movement of the artillery and heavy-weapons units (which had to move out first, but were hampered by shortage of motor transport). At 2000hrs on 25 July, Benner called a meeting in his command post in Narva; present were the commanders of I. / 'General Seyffardt' (SS-Stubaf Karl Betzwieser); II. / 'General Seyffardt' (SS-Stubaf Helmut Breymann); II. / 'De Ruiter' (SS-Hstuf Frühauf); SS-Art Regt 54 (SS-Stubaf Schlüter); and SS-Ustuf Philipp Römmelt, a platoon commander from 1. / SS-PzJg Abt 54. At around 2100hrs a brigade staff officer brought a written order authorizing the withdrawal.

At 2130hrs the headquarters of the Estonian 20. Waffen-Gren Div reported that Soviet troops had already reached the main highway at Olgino. At that point, SS-Hstuf Frühauf was ordered to clear and hold the highway, with the support of Römmelt's two assault guns. Moving west, II. / 'De Ruiter' established contact with the Btl Rebane at Vanaküla; a quick counterattack pushed the enemy back north of Olgino, where Rebane remained to hold the road. Frühauf's battalion continued westwards, destroying several Soviet tanks during clashes along the way. After deploying II. / 'De Ruiter' in ditches along the highway, SS-Hstuf

On 21 April 1944, SS-Ostubaf Wolfgang Jörchel, commanding SS-Frw PzGren Regt 48 'General Seyffardt', was awarded the Knight's Cross to mark the exemplary performance of his regiment in the defence of the Narva bridgehead. (US NARA)

Frühauf awaited the arrival of the 'General Seyffardt' Regt – but communications with SS-Ostubaf Benner had broken down.

In the meantime, at 2150hrs, Benner had received a new radio message from Brigade HQ informing him that the withdrawal was to be delayed until 2200, and a subsequent message extended that until 2315 hours. At around 2300hrs, Frühauf's men threw back another Soviet attempt to cut the highway at Peeterristi. However, Benner was informed that it had indeed been blocked in several places, and consequently decided to switch his route of withdrawal to the railway line.

Destruction of Regt 'General Seyffardt'

Before dawn on 26 July, SS-Frw PzGren Regt 48 'General Seyffardt' assembled at Narva/Kreenholm railway station and began their march west following the tracks. The last elements reached Soldino at 0500 hours. Survivors testified that Benner then received reports that the Soviets had both reached the railway ahead of him and had cut the main road at Peeterristi. The regimental commander was planning to move from the railway back to the highway and launch an attack at Peeterristi, but changed his mind again when scouts reported an alternative route from Soldino to Laagna. At about 0530hrs, 'General Seyffardt' began its march towards Laagna through wooded and swampy country that made vehicle movement difficult. Meanwhile, at Peeterristi, Frühauf and his II. / 'De Ruiter' waited in vain until 0800 for 'General Seyffardt' to arrive along the road; he then tried to locate them, but was forced by Soviet pressure to retire west of Laagna.

Benner's slow column was harassed by Soviet aircraft and artillery. At about 0800hrs, I. / 'General Seyffardt' emerged from the forest south of Tuulukse, where it attacked a strong force of Soviet infantry supported by tanks. The regiment's AT guns knocked out four of these before running out of ammunition, when Benner ordered them to be destroyed. When news of the action reached Laagna, the last assault guns of 1. / SS-PzJg Abt 54 were sent to try to open an escape route for 'General Seyffardt', but although one gun commander, SS-Rttf Derk Elsko Bruins, knocked out eight enemy tanks, the attempt failed under sheer weight of numbers.

At 0907hrs the regiment sent a final radio message to Brigade HQ: 'We are fighting to try to open a gap to the west through the forest south of Laagna'. At about 1000hrs the 'Nederland' HQ tried to re-establish radio contact: 'Where are you? There are still German units in Repniku...' Having probably received this, SS-Ostubaf Benner decided to proceed with the survivors in the direction of Repniku – where there were no longer any friendly forces. The II. / 'De Ruiter' had been forced to pull back from positions between Laagna and Repniku under the threat of renewed attack, and sometime after 0900hrs Frühauf's rearguard provided by recce troopers of SS-Aufkl Komp 54 (SS-Ostuf Erich Kuhne) was surrounded and completely wiped out at a farm near Repniku.

Ignorant of this, when he reached the vicinity after another exhausting march through the swampy forest, Benner planned an attack to break through the Soviet positions. Starting at 1730hrs, it was led by II. / 'General Seyffardt'. After only a few minutes SS-Ostubaf Benner was killed, and the regiment subsequently became confused and scattered

under heavy artillery fire. Survivors broke up into small groups to try to reach German lines further to the west, but only a few dozen succeeded; among them was SS-Ustuf Cornelius Nieuwendijk-Hoek, commander of 5. Kompanie. Intercepts of Soviet radio traffic heard a few reports of small groups of men being captured in the forest until 30 July. They also claimed that the battalion commanders, SS-Hstufs Betzweiser and Breymann, had committed suicide; but Breymann actually fell in combat, and several sources state that Betzweiser was released from Soviet captivity in 1955.

At Chanelo, SS-Hstuf Frühauf was able to gather together a small number of survivors of the regiment. Led by SS-Hstuf Friedrich Tröger, former commander of the 'General Seyffardt' Stabskompanie, they were assembled with Kriegsmarine infantry remnants into a Kampfgruppe bearing Tröger's name.

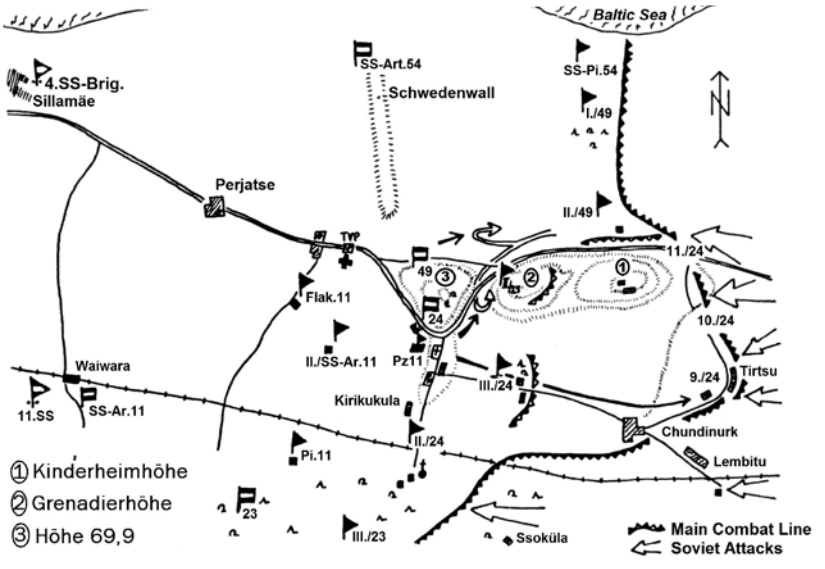
SS-Hstuf Karl-Heinz Frühauf succeeded to command of II. / SS-Frw PzGren Regt 49 'De Ruiter' on 15 March 1944, and would lead the battalion successfully through the desperate fighting retreat from Narva and the initial defence of the *Tannenbergstellung*, until he was wounded on 27 July. (US NARA)

The *Tannenbergstellung*

The new German defensive line east of the coastal town of Sillmäe extended for about 3km (nearly 2 miles) southwards from the coast, across flat terrain crossed by the Narva–Reval highway and railway line (see map, page 24). It was dominated by the so-called Blue Mountains: three hills, named from east to west Kinderheim ('Orphanage'), Grenadier, and 69.9 or Liebhöhe ('Love Hill'). Its infantry now reduced to the single SS-Frw PzGren Regt 49 'De Ruiter', the 4. SS-Frw PzGren Bde 'Nederland' was headquartered at Sillmäe and deployed in the northern sector of the Tannenberg position. SS-Ostubaf Collani established SS-Regt 49's command post on the western side of Hill 69.9, close to that of SS-Regt 24 'Danmark' from the 'Nordland' Division.

Deployed from north to south in the front line north of the highway were Estonian units of 20. Waffen-Gren Div; the Dutch Bde's SS-Pionier Btl 54; and I. / & II. / 'De Ruiter'. South of the highway were III. / and II. / 'Danmark', then III. / 'Norge', the latter in contact with the

May 1944: both SS-Brigaf Wagner (left) and the soldiers in the foreground – who have evidently been decorated that day with the Iron Cross 2nd Class – already wear the new M1944 *getarnter Drillichanzug* combat uniform of four-pocket camouflaged jacket and trousers, although the order for its general issue was only dated 1 March. (US NARA)



Sketch map of the *Tannenbergstellung*, with deployments of surviving units of the 'Nederland' Bde and 'Nordland' Div in July–September 1944. Note, (1) Kinderheimhöhe is Orphanage Hill. (Author's map)

Army's 11. Infanterie-Division. From east to west, Orphanage Hill was held by Flemish volunteers of Kampfgruppe Rehmann from 6. SS-Frw Sturmbrigade 'Langemarck', whose anti-tank guns were emplaced at its foot; Grenadier Hill and Hill 69.9 were held by other elements of the Estonian division, plus companies of SS-Pionier Btl 11 from the 'Nordland' Division. The most forward positions on both sides of the highway were defended by II. / 'De Ruiter' (SS-Hstuf Frühauf) on the northern side and by III. / 'Danmark' (SS-Stubaf Hans Kappus) on the southern. Other positions further back along the road were manned by Kampfgruppe Tröger.

Late July 1944 On the afternoon of 26 July the Soviets unleashed a massive bombardment, particularly against Orphanage Hill and along the main road. As soon as darkness fell infantry and tanks attacked south of the highway, overwhelming a naval infantry company. The tanks parked themselves facing Orphanage Hill, while Soviet infantry entrenched on its eastern side. Along the Narva–Reval road Kampfgruppe Tröger destroyed numerous Soviet tanks while holding off at least four separate attacks. The battle-group's adjutant, SS-Standarten-Oberjunker (NCO Officer Candidate) Georg Schluifelder, volunteered to go and restore contact with forward elements when shellfire cut communications; he then took tactical command, and distinguished himself while directing the defence.

The command post of SS-Frw PzGren Regt 49 'De Ruiter' on the north side of Hill 69.9 – (3) on the map above – in the Tannenberg defences, summer 1944. (US NARA)

Early on 27 July, the Soviets shelled the area between the highway and the railway line, then launched infantry and tank attacks. Once again, the anti-tank gunners of 'Nederland' and 'Nordland' were severely tested, but many tanks were destroyed at close range. Pressure then shifted to the area of Chundinurk and the sectors defended by II. / 'Danmark' and III. /'Norge', while

(continued on page 33)

NATIONAL SOCIALISTISCHE BEWEGING
1: Anton Mussert, NSB *Leider*
2: NSB *Districts-Leider*, 1941
3: *Hopman*, *Lijfwacht v.d. Leider*; Amsterdam, 1942

WEER AFDEELINGEN & NEDERLANDSCHE-SS
1: Arie Zondervan, WA *Commandant*, 1943
2: WA *Opperwachtmeister*, Utrecht, 1942
3: Hendrik Feldmeijer, *Nederlandsche-SS Voorman*, 1940

DUTCH VOLUNTEERS, 1941

1: LtGen Hendrik Seyffardt; The Hague, October 1941

2: *Legions-Schütze*, *Frw Legion Niederlande*, October 1941

3: *SS-Schütze*, *SS-Frw Standarte 'Westland'*, spring 1941

***FREIWILLIGEN LEGION NIEDERLANDE*, RUSSIA, 1942**
1: *Legions-Sturmann*, *Stabskompanie*; Selo Gora, summer
2: *Legions-Schütze*; Volkhov front, February
3: *Legions-Schütze*; Leningrad front, June

INSIGNIA
See commentary text for details

4. SS-FRW PZGREN BDE 'NEDERLAND'; ESTONIA, 1944
1: *SS-Schütze, SS-Regt 48 'General Seyffardt'*; January
2: *SS-Uscha, SS-Regt 49 'De Ruiter'*; March
3: *SS-Ustuf, SS-Art Regt 54*; August

PERSONALITIES

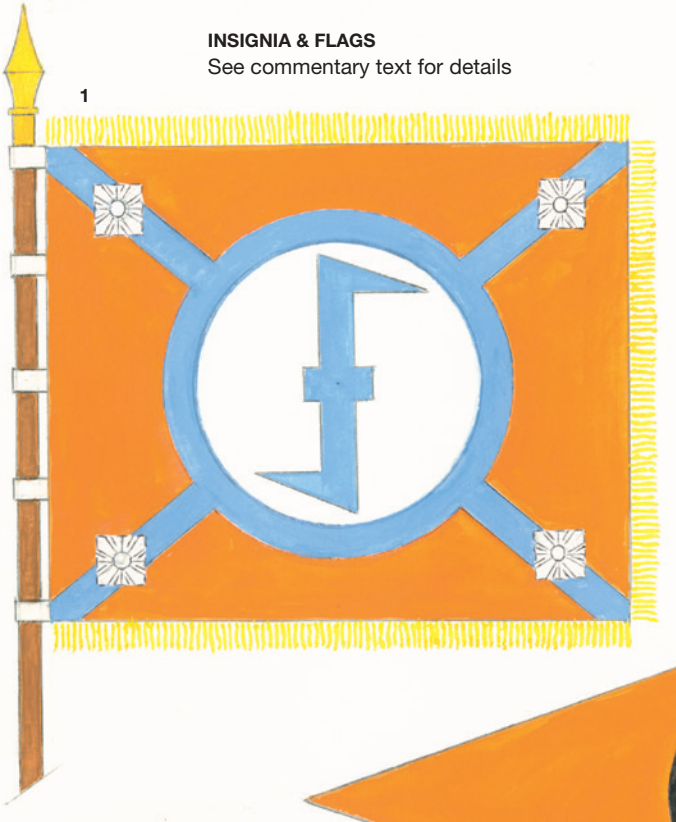
1: *SS-Brigaf u. Genmaj der Waffen-SS* Jürgen Wagner, summer 1943

2: *SS-Oscha* Derk Elsko Bruins, 1. / *SS-PzJäg Abt 54*; February 1945

3: *SS-Oscha* Gerardus Mooyman, *SS-PzJäg Abt 54*; March 1944

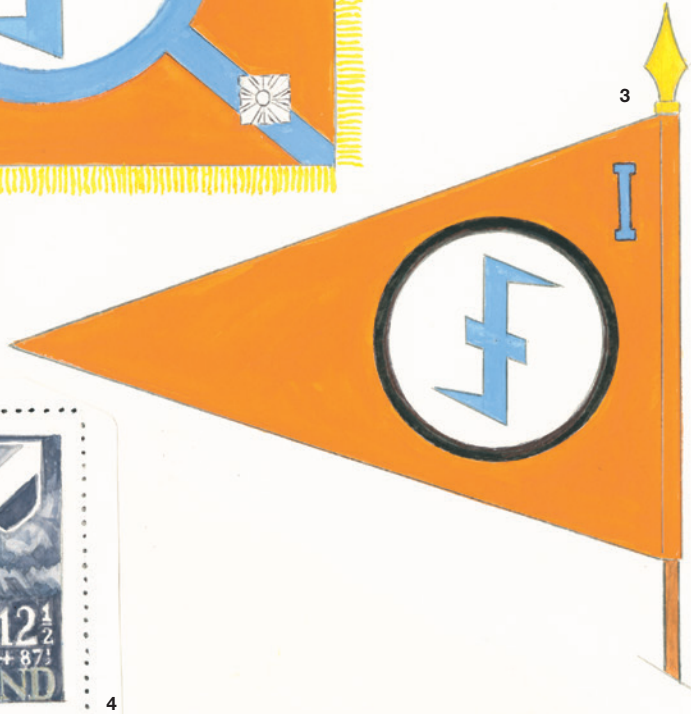
INSIGNIA & FLAGS
See commentary text for details

1



2

3



4

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6

H

simultaneous attacks forced the Flemish volunteers from their positions on Orphanage Hill. The II. / 'De Ruiter' continued to hold its positions north of that feature, though SS-Hstuf Frühauf was wounded and replaced in command by SS-Ostuf Helmut Scholz.

The fighting on 28 July continued to focus on Orphanage Hill, but later extended to Grenadier Hill. At dawn on 29 July, heavy shellfire fell mainly on Grenadier Hill and the village of Chundinurk. The subsequent attacks, including by more than 100 Soviet tanks, soon encompassed the whole area of the Blue Mountains. Under SS-Ostuf Scholz, II. / 'De Ruiter' somehow managed to hang on to their positions. The Soviets worked around their southern flank, and tanks were knocked out with Panzerfausts at less than 50 yards' range while machine guns raked the infantry. Both Hill 69.9 and Grenadier Hill were on the verge of falling; tanks were firing directly into the infantry positions, and in the regimental command post SS-Ostubaf Collani was seriously wounded. When the Soviet infantry approached he fired at them with his pistol, then used the last round on himself rather than be taken prisoner. Regimental command passed temporarily to SS-Hstuf Karl-Heinz Ertel, who led the continuing Dutch defence with great tenacity, personally knocking out two tanks with Panzerfausts. Fighting continued over the next two days, and on 30 July Felix Steiner addressed the Dutch Bde in a new order of the day: 'Comrades, today you have won a decisive defensive battle. During this past day you have destroyed more than 110 tanks, inflicted severe losses on the enemy and blocked his intention to advance on Reval. Your courage and your heroism have been exemplary...'

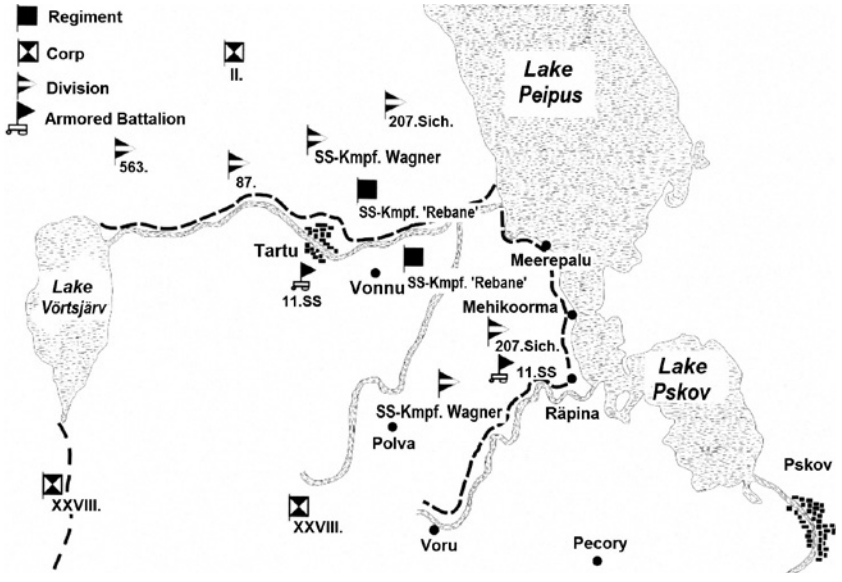
Here wearing a fashionably crushed example of the 'old style officer's field cap', SS-Ostuf Helmut Scholz, formerly of 7. Kompanie, commanded II Btl of 'De Ruiter' from 27 July until 19 August 1944, when he was wounded during the fighting north of Orphanage Hill in the Tannenberg defences. (US NARA)

August 1944 During the first half of August the brigade's SS-Frw Art Regt 54 was reorganized: I. Abteilung became III. Abt (7., 8. & 9. Batterie), under SS-Stubaf Lothar Hofer. A new I. Abt was created by transferring the III. Abt from SS-Polizei Art Regt 4, and II. Abt remained unchanged. Also, from 5 August, command of SS-Regt 49 'De Ruiter' passed to SS-Ostubaf Fritz Bunse, former commander of the 'Nordland' Div's engineer battalion.

During the month, fighting continued with relentless intensity. On 19 August, SS-Hstuf Ertel took over II. / 'De Ruiter' from the wounded SS-Ostuf Scholz, and the battalion was deployed in several trench lines north-east of Orphanage Hill. In the last days of August, it was there that the Soviets attacked with a penal battalion following a heavy artillery bombardment. The assault was repelled with the help of Dutch heavy weapons and German artillery; in the course of this action an SS-Oscha Walther, recently arrived from a Luftwaffe Feld-Div, led a counterattack which eliminated a dangerous penetration and restored contact with companies that had been cut off. On 29 August, SS-Hstuf Ertel turned over II. / 'De Ruiter' to SS-Hstuf Otto Petersen – the battalion's fourth commander in a month.

Kampfgruppe Wagner at Tartu

While fighting continued on the Tannenburgstellung, the Soviets launched another offensive further south. After making crossings



Sketch map of the theatre of operations of Kampfgruppe Wagner during the brief defence of the Ema River line through Tartu in late August 1944. (Author's map)

over the Narva River south of Lake Peipus and the cities of Pskov and Opochka, the Red Army planned to thrust deeply westwards towards the coast at Riga, capital of Latvia, whose capture would cut the German armies in the Baltic region in half. Simultaneously, they aimed to hook north to take the forces still in northern Estonia from behind. To counter this, SS-Ogruf Steiner was ordered to send troops to take part in a new south-facing defence based on the city of Tartu (Dorpat in German), half way along the Emajögi (Ema) River linking lakes Võrtsjäv (Wirz) and Peipus.

The Kampfgruppe commanded by SS-Brigaf Wagner consisted of an artillery battalion from the 'Nederland' Bde; the remnant of the Flemish battle-group; the last remaining vehicles of the 'Nordland' recce battalion, and the last assault guns of both 'Nederland' and 'Nordland'; plus the Estonian I. / Waffen-Gren Regiment 47. To reinforce the Estonian infantry, 300 Belgian volunteers from 5. SS-Frw Sturmbrigade 'Wallonien' were taken directly from reorganization at the Debica training camp, and were led in the field by their commander, SS-Stubaf Léon Degrelle. The bulk of 'Nederland' that remained on the Tannenberg position was eventually commanded by Oberst Paul Kresin, the III. SS-Pz Korps senior Army artillery officer (an appointment which emphasized the heavy officer losses among the Waffen-SS volunteers).

During the night of 15/16 August the units of Kampfgruppe Wagner were pulled back from their positions, and the next day II. / SS-Art Regt 54 (SS-Hstuf Quintus De Veer) entrained at Jöhwi station for Tartu, where the other units followed. While in that city, SS-Brigaf Wagner, badly short of infantry, recruited Estonian civilians between the ages of 16 and 50, equipping them with what little was available. His units were deployed south of Tartu, sending out patrols to locate the enemy's leading elements.

20–26 August 1944 On 20 August, II. / SS-Art Regt 54 was moved some 20km (12.5 miles) south-east of the city to provide support for the Estonians and the Army's 11. Infanterie-Division. Supporting the latter's Fusilier-Bataillon 11 under heavy Soviet pressure, SS-Ustuf Günther

Horstmann's 4. Batterie fired 350 shells in just 40 minutes, stemming the advance twice before being withdrawn to new positions at Meliste, north-west of Vonnu.

On 21 August the enemy were reported to have reached Kanepi, west-south-west of Polva on the road leading north from Voru to Tartu, and SS-Brigaf Wagner sent Degrelle's Walloons south to block them on 21–23 August. After holding around Kanepi as long as possible, and despite the support of Maj Rudel's Stuka tank-busters of SG 2, the Walloons were then forced to withdraw to new positions west of Tartu in the Ema River bend.

On 24 August, 'Nordland's', SS-Pz Aufkl Abt 11 (SS-Stubaf Saalbach), as part of the Army's Kampfgruppe Graf Strachwitz, captured the town of Tamsa further to the north, and was then attached to Kampfgruppe Wagner. On the same day the Red Army reached the southern shore of Lake Vörtsjäv, thus separating Armee Abteilung Narwa from Eighteenth Army.

On 25 August, Tartu fell to Soviet forces, which crossed the Ema and established a bridgehead on the north bank. Both the Estonians and the Walloons were committed to battle near the village of Noela, and the Dutch gunners of II. / SS-Art Regt 54 continued to provide support until obliged to withdraw. SS-Stubaf Degrelle was then ordered to form a blocking position on the plain north of Tartu.

Retreat from Estonia: Pärnu

On 14 September the Soviet offensive against Army Group North resumed, and on the 16th Hitler agreed to the evacuation of the German forces facing encirclement in Estonia and withdrawal into Latvia. On the 17th the task of shipping troops out from Tallinn (Reval) on the northern coast became more urgent when the Soviet 3rd Baltic Front broke through northwards east of Tartu on a 25km (15.5-mile) front.

The III. SS-Pz Korps units in the Tannenberg positions slipped away from Soviet Eighth Army on the night of 18/19 September. At dawn the Danish and Norwegian grenadiers reached the bridge at Sillimäe, which

On the Tartu front, SS-Brigaf Wagner (left) is photographed with the Belgian Walloon volunteer commander SS-Stubaf Léon Degrelle (centre), and Wagner's adjutant SS-Ostubaf Max Schäfer; the latter would lead a battle-group in October 1944, during the final withdrawal from Estonia into Kurland. Degrelle and Schäfer wear the M1944 camouflage uniform. (US NARA)

was defended by Dutch volunteers; once they had crossed, the bridge was blown. During that day units from 'Nordland' and 'Nederland' reached the Kohtla-Järve area, and by the night of 20/21 September were near Pärnu, a port at the northern end of the Gulf of Riga.

Tallinn was abandoned to the Soviet Leningrad Front on 22 September, while along the whole Estonian front desperate columns were retreating towards the western coast in the face of the advancing 3rd and 2nd Baltic Fronts. 'Nederland' was tasked with holding Pärnu for at least three days to ensure the evacuation of as many troops as possible. Kampfgruppe Bunse, assembled around I. / SS-Regt 49 'De Ruiter', succeeded in this, before blowing up the harbour facilities on 23 September and withdrawing southwards to Wolmar, while the 'Nordland' reconnaissance battalion repositioned east of Moiseküll. On 24–25 September, Kampfgruppe Petersen (II. / 'De Ruiter') held positions along the Lemmer River, blocking the coastal road to the south and the Latvian border.

While the retreating Germans took up defensive positions about 30km (18.5 miles) north-east of Riga on 26 September, the 'Nederland' units were moved south-east and given a few hours rest in woods south of the village of Kelava. With the direct road to Riga from the north temporarily blocked, the Soviet High Command switched the emphasis of 1st Baltic Front to a thrust from the south-east towards the coast at Memel in Lithuania, to cut off the Kurland peninsula. An early objective was the town of Doblen (Dobele), about 60km (37 miles) south of Riga. Units of III. SS-Pz Korps were ordered to the area of Tukum, where SS-Brigaf Ziegler, commander of 'Nordland', was to intercept the leading Soviet elements thrusting towards the coast. On 28 September the 'Norge' and 'Danmark' Regts, plus the 'Nederland' Bde (now reconstituted by the return of the Kampfgruppe Wagner elements), went to occupy defensive positions prepared north of Doblen (see map opposite).

Kampfgruppe Schäfer On 30 September the Germanic volunteers were hit by artillery fire but repulsed the infantry attack which followed. On 5–6 October they were transferred south-west to the Autz sector, and the 'Nordland' Div was ordered to form a blocking group to be sent as soon as possible to the area north of Moscheiken. Commanded by and named after SS-Ostubaf Max Schäfer, this consisted of the engineer battalions of both 'Nordland' and 'Nederland', the 'Nordland' reconnaissance battalion, three artillery batteries from 'Nederland', and the III. SS-Pz Korps security company. The battle-group took up positions in Moscheiken, between two Army infantry divisions, in a defensive line extending along the Vadakalis River.

On 10 October, Soviet attacks forced back both the Army divisions, obliging Schäfer to withdraw in his turn to avoid encirclement by enemy armour. Disengaging under fire, the volunteers began digging-in between the villages of Asvinsi and Bugisi but were hit by flanking attacks before they could get established, so were forced to retreat yet again, to the village of Micini. The arrival of a few Panzers then allowed them to counterattack, retaking the ground they had just lost. The engineers from 'Nordland' and 'Nederland' saw particularly tough fighting, against first infantry and then tanks, but were saved by enfilade fire from the Dutch gunners. During the following two days German artillery kept the Soviets in check, allowing the exhausted battle-group to hold on until relieved by an Army unit.

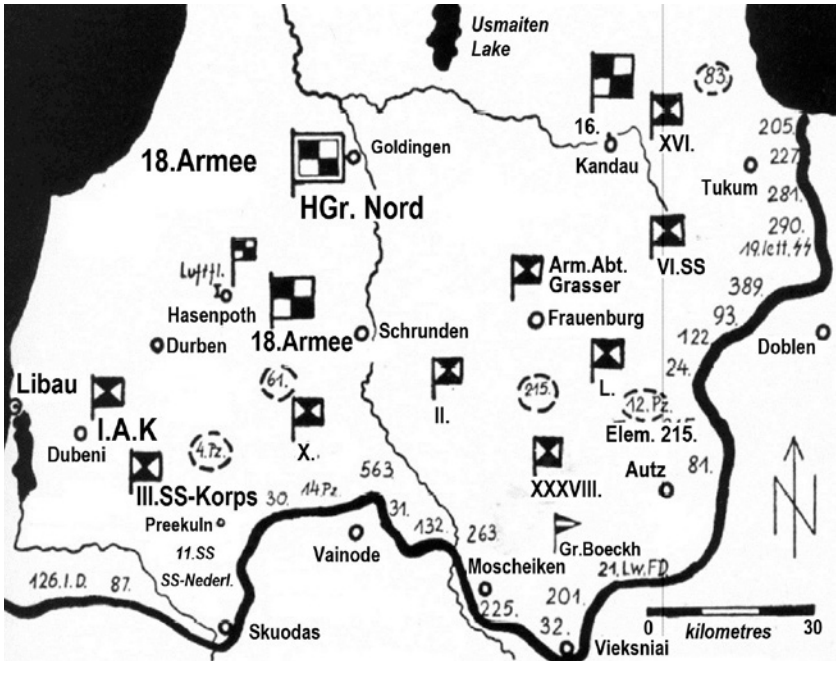
KURLAND

In early October 1944 some 200,000 men of GenFM Schörner's Army Group North – the remnants of 33 divisions – fell back into Latvia's Kurland peninsula, their last foothold in the Baltic region. By 10 October the Soviets had trapped these formations by reaching the west coast south of them at Palanga and Memel. Libau (Liepaja) was the last port in Kurland that could still be used by the Kriegsmarine, and Schörner proposed the sea evacuation of the troops from the pocket to East Prussia. Characteristically, Hitler ordered resistance to the bitter end.

From 14 October 1944, the units of the 'Nordland' Div and 'Nederland' Bde took up positions between 11. Inf Div of I. Armee Korps and 30. Inf Div of X. AK in Eighteenth Army's south-western sector, where the swampy forest at least lent itself to defensive operations. The units of III. SS-Pz Korps were deployed as follows, in a rough L-shape: 'Nordland's' II. / & III. / 'Norge' were on two hills along the Preekuln–Vainode railway line, and II. / & III. / 'Danmark' east and west of the village of Trekni. The two remaining infantry battalions of 'Nederland' were along the Preekuln–Skuodas railway line, with II. / 'De Ruiter' to the east of Annenhof and I. / 'De Ruiter' holding the stretch as far as Ozoli. The Dutch brigade's command post was at Susten. Kampfgruppe Aigner (under the artillery officer SS-Hstuf Anton Aigner), comprising the remainder of 'Nederland', plus a few German units, held positions between Ozoli and Flossen.

Operations, October 1944–January 1945

During the so-called 'first battle of Kurland', both battalions of 'De Ruiter' were almost immediately pulled out of these positions and sent westwards, to meet a Soviet breakthrough in the sector of 11. Inf Div north of the Tirspurvs swamps. During the course of two days' fighting the Dutch



Dispositions of German Army Group North in the southern part of the Kurland pocket, 22 October 1944, with 11. SS-Div 'Nordland' and the 'Nederland' Bde at lower left, north of Skuodas. (Author's map)

Two Waffen-SS riflemen in Kurland, both wearing the M1944 *getarnter Drillichanzug*; other photos show mixed use of this and the older camouflage smock. The man on the right has a standard Mauser Kar 98k, but his comrade can just be seen to hold against his leg a Sturmgewehr 44 semi-automatic rifle; note under his arm the ends of the thick triple magazine pouches for that weapon. (US NARA)

captured many heavy weapons, and for his unit's conduct SS-Ostuf Otto Petersen, commanding II. / 'De Ruiter', would be awarded the Knight's Cross on 11 December. The gap was sealed with help from elements of 11. and 87. Inf Divs, and 'De Ruiter' returned to its positions around Kaleti.

Second battle of Kurland, late October 1944 Meanwhile, the Soviets had amassed forces in the area between Preekuln, Skuodas and Vainode. At 0600hrs on 27 October, more than 2,000 artillery pieces of all calibres opened fire simultaneously. The sector between Skuodas and Vainode was attacked by 5th Guards Tank Div, with about 400 armoured vehicles. The line held by 'Nordland' was immediately threatened, and that of 'Nederland' soon afterwards. Shells began falling on the positions of Petersen's battalion near Spuri, and the Dutch grenadiers soon had to repel Soviet infantry all along the line between the villages of Jostini, Puzi and Zarini. The enemy then almost effected a breakthrough at Purmsati on the southern flank, but were held off at the last minute by III. / 'Danmark'. The Dutch came under bombardment and assault again on 28 October, when several strongpoints of II. / 'De Ruiter' were overrun. All available men were gathered for a final defensive effort, but then a heavy rainstorm mired the Soviet tanks in deep mud, and without their support the infantry withdrew.

On 29 October better weather allowed the Red Air Force to strafe and bomb the defences, and the assaults resumed. Losses that day were horrific; Soviet infantry broke through at several points, forcing 'Nordland' and 'Nederland' to mount desperate counterattacks. One was led by the commander of 5. / SS-Art Regt 54, SS-Ustuf Herbert Reith, after his battery ran out of ammunition (he would be awarded the Knight's Cross on 11 December).

The German positions beyond the railway embankment were wiped out, forcing II. / 'De Ruiter' to fall back, while the enemy also attacked I. / 'De Ruiter' from the area of Rudbarzi. Their main thrust was against Hill 36.5 at Ozoli, on the battalion's southern flank, where 2. Kompanie were overrun and, having lost their commander and all the platoon

leaders, the survivors abandoned the hill. At that point SS-Ustuf Georg Schluifelder, then in command of 1. Kompanie, led a counterattack with all of the men he was able to rally, managing to retake the hill. The Soviets very quickly returned to attack the position, threatening to completely surround the Dutch grenadiers. Schluifelder decided to counterattack yet again to prevent the worst, and was able to hold the position and remain in command, despite the fact that he had been wounded.

The fighting around Ozoli lasted until early November. During that period, SS-Stubaf Hans Lohmann, returning from a long convalescence after having been seriously wounded on the Oranienbaum front in February 1944 while commanding III. / 'Norge', replaced SS-Ostubaf Bunse as regimental commander of 'De Ruiter', with his command post at Kaleti. Several weeks of heavy rain then reduced the intensity of the fighting, and an attack on the I. / 'De Ruiter' sector on 24 November achieved little. Otherwise combat was limited to artillery duels and patrol activity, and the lull allowed the 'Nederland' engineers, with help from several German units, to strengthen the defences under cover of night. The Flak company now emplaced its 20mm guns at critical points along the line for ground firing.

In early December the increasing cold hardened the mud, allowing the Red Army to resume tank and infantry attacks along the whole front. Again the German anti-tank personnel, by now mainly armed with the Panzerfaust and a few Panzerschreck 'bazookas', were severely tested, and the field artillery had to join in the task of repelling tank attacks. Despite their great superiority in men and equipment, the Soviets continued to achieve only limited success, remaining stalled along the main line of resistance. On 11 December the commander of the 'Nederland' Bde. SS-Brigaf Jürgen Wagner, added the Oakleaves to his Knight's Cross for his exemplary leadership in the front line over many months.

Third battle of Kurland, December 1944–January 1945 On 21 December, a new offensive was launched by four Soviet armies: the Third, Fourth, Tenth Guards, and the Forty-Second. The dual objectives were Frauenberg in the east, and Libau on the west coast. Fully 20 Soviet divisions were committed to an attempt to reach the Libau–Frauenberg road and railway, but despite their inferiority in numbers the quick reactions of 12. Pz Div and 227. Inf Div dealt with the initial penetrations after two days. The front held by III. SS-Pz Korps remained relatively quiet, though plagued by artillery and sniper fire. The Dutch brigade was assigned the difficult task of flushing out Soviet snipers, and in the first week of January alone one of its best marksmen, SS-Uscha Steincke, chalked up 20 personal kills – a score to which he added in the days that followed.

Fourth battle of Kurland. January 1945 This began with massive Soviet artillery bombardments on 23 January, followed by attacks against 30. Inf Div and the units of III. SS-Pz Korps both sides of Preekuln, launched by 11 Red Army divisions with the aim of reaching Libau. Along the Dutch defensive line, two key positions stood in the Soviets' path: that of II. / 'De Ruiter' north of the Gross Gramsden–Kaleti road and the Annenhof heights, and to the south of the road the hill of Ozoli, defended by a company of I. / 'De Ruiter' commanded by SS-Ustuf Georg Schluifelder. Most of the fighting was concentrated around Ozoli, whose defenders held out all day under numerous attacks. Very effective fire support was provided by SS-Art Regt 54 (SS-Stubaf Schlüter), thanks to prompt and accurate fire directions provided by SS-Ostuf Klemens Behler commanding 3. Batterie.

On the second day, 24 January, another massed artillery bombardment pounded the Dutch positions. The 'Nederland' Bde had four battalions in its defensive line, deployed as follows from north to south: SS-Pion Btl 54 (SS-Hstuf Wanhöfer) – a reinforced engineer company, a reconnaissance company, and two 20mm Flak platoons; II. / 'De Ruiter' (SS-Stubaf Petersen); I. / 'De Ruiter' (SS-Stubaf Gerhard Unger); and Kampfgruppe Aigner (SS-Hstuf Aigner), this last consisting primarily of SS-Pz Jäg Abt 54. Heavy enemy pressure intensified during the day, and the first position to fall was the hill at Ozoli, where 1. Kompanie was wiped out; the seriously wounded SS-Ustuf Schluifelder shot himself rather than be captured.

The main line of resistance was then shifted further west, behind the railway line. The enemy attacks now focused on the Gross Gramsden–Kaleti road, and the Soviets were able to advance along both sides of this after a series of furious close-quarter engagements. SS-Ostuf Behler and a few of his gunners were able to withdraw only at the last minute, while 6. / 'De Ruiter' (SS-Ostuf Hellmers) clung doggedly to its positions. On the northern flank of the Dutch positions, SS-Pionier Btl 54 was only lightly engaged during the day, but after dark a new Soviet breakthrough forced them to fall back further to the west. During that night the Dutch positions were stiffened by Army reinforcements.

25 January 1945 On this date the forces in the pocket, commanded for the past ten days by GenObst Lothar Rendulic, were redesignated as Heeresgruppe Kurland.

The positions of 'De Ruiter' were again heavily bombarded, followed by infantry attacks which achieved many breakthroughs. The heights around Annenhof, Meiri and Olzonieki were lost, and with communications completely disrupted some Dutch volunteers fought on in isolated mixed battle-groups or even solitary platoons. SS-Ostuf Hellmers' 6. Kompanie and I. / SS-Art Regt 54 continued to hold their positions doggedly. When Soviet infantry were on the verge of overrunning them, a successful counterattack by a handful of men was led by an artillery private, Kanonier Jenschke, whose camouflage smock had disguised his lack of rank.

Meanwhile, the engineers under SS-Hstuf Wanhöfer also continued to hold their positions against repeated attacks. After dark on 25/26 January the Soviets worked their way around the sappers' southern flank to attack them from the rear, while other units advanced on them from the east along the Gramsden–Kaleti road. The 'Nederland' engineers warded off all the nighttime attacks, thanks in part to the arrival of two assault guns carrying Dutch grenadiers.

26 January 1945 The threatened regimental command post of 'De Ruiter' was moved to Klein-Kaleti, and the defensive line was shifted to behind Kaleti. While the 'Nordland' sector remained relatively quiet, 'Nederland' continued fighting during that day. The brigade's last remaining assault guns managed to destroy a number of enemy tanks before having to pull back. North of Kaleti, a hasty counterattack with the support of assault guns was repulsed by the Soviets. In successful defence of Hill 42.4, 7. / 'De Ruiter' (SS-Ostuf Emil Grabow) fought with particular valour, and Grabow himself personally knocked out a T-34 with a Panzerfaust before being seriously wounded. (Having already distinguished himself in previous actions, Emil Grabow would be awarded the German Cross in

SS-Stubaf Hans Lohmann (left) took command of Regt 'De Ruiter' in Kurland in November 1944; he had previously commanded III. / 'Norge' in the 'Nordland' Div, being seriously wounded on the Oranienbaum front. He is photographed with the highly decorated SS-Ustuf Georg Schluifelder, a survivor of II. / 'General Seyffardt' who then commanded 'De Ruiter's' 1. Kompanie. Schluifelder received the German Cross in Gold on 14 November in retrospective recognition of his courage at Narva and in the *Tannenbergstellung*, and the Knight's Cross on 26 November for leading a vital counterattack at Ozoli. When his company was overrun there on 24 January 1945, Schluifelder shot himself rather than be captured. (US NARA)

Gold on 9 March 1945). A new counterattack by assault guns from 14. Pz Div temporarily threw back the Soviets.

Kampfgruppe Wanhöfer, still holding out north-east of Kaleti, was also attacked in the afternoon by enemy tanks, and SS-Hstuf Wanhöfer was forced to order a withdrawal to avoid annihilation. The Dutch engineers had to fight hard to open a route to the area north-west of Kaleti; Wanhöfer himself was seriously wounded and was picked up by his men at the last moment before the arrival of enemy tanks. A new defensive position was established west of the Wartage River with several emergency units arriving from Libau. The 'De Ruiter' regimental command post was moved there, while SS-Stubaf Petersen commanded survivors in positions at Klein-Kaleti.

27–28 January 1945 Heavy Soviet shelling fell on Klein-Kaleti on 27 January, while Petersen's men clung tenaciously to their positions. Some assault guns arrived to halt a Soviet tank attack, and SS-Stubaf Petersen was able to defend the village for another night, before being ordered to withdraw on the 28th. The shreds of the 'Nederland' Bde continued to hold a line Krute–Klein Kaleti–Kodeli until they were relieved by units from 14. Pz Div and 218. Infanterie Division. Despite its periodic reinforcement with odds and ends such as Kriegsmarine sailors, by the end of this last battle the 'De Ruiter' Regt had been reduced to about 80 men still fit to fight.

Retreat from Kurland, and aftermath

At the end of January the remaining elements of III. (germ) SS-Pz Korps were assembled around Libau to be shipped back to Germany for their very necessary reinforcement and reorganization before deployment on the Pomeranian front.

Beginning on 30 January 1945, units from the 'Nordland' Div and 'Nederland' Bde were transported to Stettin by the ships *Elbe*, *Ilmenau* and *Preussen*. Elements of the brigade staff and the Korps engineer battalion were embarked on the *R.O.I.*, and II. / 'De Ruiter', SS-Pion Btl 54 and SS-Aufkl Abt 54 were shipped aboard the *Michael Ferdinand*. Escorted by German U-boats, all these vessels reached Germany, though many 'Nederland'

Waffen-SS volunteer of either 'Nederland' or 'Nordland' aiming a 150mm *Panzerfaust 60* anti-tank rocket. By the time of the Kurland battles much of the anti-tank fighting had to be done by infantry issued with this mass-produced single-shot weapon with a range of 60m, or the less often available 8.8cm *Panzerschreck* reloadable 'bazooka' at ranges of 150–180m. (US NARA)

personnel are reported to have been lost when another transport, the *Moira*, was torpedoed by a Soviet submarine. In parallel with this continuing Operation 'Hannibal', German and Latvian forces in Kurland fought on until the last 135,000 men were forced to surrender on 8 May 1945.

While the leading units of SS-Ogruf Steiner's corps were reaching Pomerania, the SS-FHA had decided to absorb what remained of the Dutch brigade into a new division, the 23. SS-Freiwilligen Panzergrenadier Division 'Nederland' (niederländische Nr.1), which was officially created in December 1944 under the continuing command of SS-Brigaf Jürgen Wagner. (The number '23' had previously been assigned to the Bosnian 23. Waffen-Gebirgs Div der SS 'Kama' (kroatische Nr.2), which had been disbanded in October 1944.)

The first elements of the new division were assembled around Gollnow, north-east of Stettin. Most of the Netherlands had by now been liberated by the British and Canadian armies, and the Germans were simultaneously trying to form another 'scratch' Dutch division (34. SS-Frw Gren Div 'Landstorm Nederland'). For these reasons recruitment for the 23. 'Nederland' Div never exceeded about 2,200 men before it was posted to the front around Stettin and Stargard. In the final weeks of the war its remnants moved south along the Oder front, fighting at Fürstenwalde east of Berlin before managing to surrender to US forces near Magdeburg.

Under Dutch law, persons aged 21 or over who had entered German military or paramilitary service were liable to lose their citizenship, and those guilty of military collaboration might also be imprisoned. The death penalty was only available to the courts in the most extreme cases (e.g. Anton Mussert, shot on 7 May 1946). The official figures record that of some 50,000 people potentially liable, about 40,000 were deprived of their citizenship, though in most cases this was eventually restored. Some veterans of the Volunteer Netherlands Legion and Brigade were sentenced to relatively short terms in prison, most of which were later commuted upon review. For instance, in 1947 a Dutch court sentenced the anti-tank officer Gerardus Mooyman to six years imprisonment, of which he served less than three. (He finally died in a car crash in 1987.)

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PLATE COMMENTARIES

A: *NATIONAL SOCIALISTISCHE BEWEGING*

A1: Anton Adriaan Mussert, NSB *Leider*

Mussert, formerly a civil engineer who had been responsible for the waterways of Utrecht province, wore unique but restrained insignia on the all-black NSB uniform: his gold Leader's badge of a hand grasping a bundle of arrows on the shoulder straps and cap band. The NSB officers' cap had gold cords, and a small gold upper badge of the Dutch rampant lion emblem. Their left sleeve patch was a black/red halved triangle edged gold, with gold 'N', 'S' and 'B' in the corners, and a central shield with horizontal stripes in the national colours of blue, white and red, bearing the national lion emblem (see also Plate B2). Minor details of the proportions varied with the wearer's rank.

A2: NSB *Districts-Leider,* 1941

NSB officers ('political leaders') displayed a smaller version of the left sleeve patch on the cap band. A complex sequence of rectangular collar patches of rank were based on those of the German SS, but with gold four-point stars and piping, and (until 1942) colours identifying different branches – normally light blue, but also green, yellow or black for various specialisms; thereafter only blue or black were used. The uniform was completed by a 'Sam Browne' belt, and either straight trousers with shoes or riding breeches with boots.

A3: *Hopman, Lijfwacht v.d. Leider;* Amsterdam, 1942

The *Mussert Garde* was created in 1939 from selected members of the WA party militia, and reorganized as the 'Lifeguard of the Leader' after the German occupation. This captain wears a German M35/40 steel helmet with the all-black NSB uniform, and special insignia. The gold and black collar patches bear the Leader's hand-and-arrows on the right and three rank stars on the left. The cord shoulder straps, of German junior officers' type, bear no rank stars. On the left pocket he wears the commemorative badge of the former Mussert Garde, and on his belt the Lifeguard officers' special oval gilt buckle-clasp. On his left forearm is one of two known patterns of yellow-on-black cuffband, lettered '*Lijfwacht v.d. Leider'.* He is holding the Leader's personal standard.

B: *WEER AFDEELINGEN & NEDERLANDSCHE-SS*

B1: Arie Johannes Zondervan, WA *Commandant,* 1943

A pre-war law student and aide to Mussert, Zondervan served as a sergeant in a Dutch Army motorized unit during the 1939–40 mobilization. Immediately released from German captivity, he was appointed by Mussert as national commander of the revived WA in May 1940. Here he wears the NSB officers' uniform and Dutch lion upper cap badge, but with the WA's sleeve and cap-band badges of a vertical gold 'wolf hook' centred on a black/red triangle. Red WA

Johannes Hendrijk Feldmeijer, leader of the *Nederlandsche-SS* and later the *Germaansche-SS in Niederlande*. See also Plate B3. (Courtesy Hugh Page Taylor Collection)

collar patches bear the second version of his unique rank insignia, a gold-circled 'wolf hook' set in a thick gold wreath, and his shoulder straps are of interwoven gold cord. On his left breast is the WA 'Old Fighter's' badge.

The buttonhole ribbons of the German Iron Cross 2nd Class and 1941/42 Eastern Winter Medal demand some explanation. Zondervan served from December 1941 to March 1942 as an administrative Legions-Untersturmführer in the Volunter Netherlands Legion, and from February 1942 on the Volkhov front, where a reported patrol exploit brought him (controversially) the Iron Cross. Apart from a fact-finding mission to the front later in 1942, he spent the rest of the war in the Netherlands. Imprisoned from 1945 to 1959, he died in obscurity in Germany at an unknown date, probably in the 1980s.

B2: WA *Opperwachtmeister*, Utrecht District, 1942

This sergeant-equivalent holds the banner of the NSB's Utrecht District Nr 1, where the party headquarters were located, as was the WA's *Ban 1*. Non-commissioned ranks' caps did not display the Dutch lion upper badge, and had leather chinstraps. The red collar patches both bore a sequence of gold rank bars and stars, with gold edge-piping for officers. Non-commissioned ranks' shoulder straps were checkered black-and-red. Note that the WA's black, red and yellow sleeve patch did not bear the NSB's initials shown on the banner.

B3: J. Hendrik Feldmeijer, *Nederlandsche-SS Voorman*, late 1940

Feldmeijer, a former commander of the Mussert Garde, played a major role in the NSB's creation of this imitation of the German Allgemeine-SS. Immediate differences from the standard NSB officers' uniform are the silver rather than gold distinctions; a silver-metal *Wolfsangel* upper cap badge, worn above the SS *Totenkopf*; the silver-wire SS runes and edging on the right sleeve diamond; a silver-wire *Wolfsangel* and edging to the black/red WA left sleeve triangle; and a plain black cuffband, edged silver, on the left forearm. Felmeijer's unique collar patches as Voorman bear a rounded *trifos* (a slimmer variation of Plate E4). Ranks below colonel-equivalent wore a regimental number (1–5) on the right patch and SS rank on the left; the patches and right sleeve diamonds of non-commissioned ranks were edged with black/white twist. All ranks wore a single right shoulder strap and the blank cuffband.

Feldmeijer served a brief attachment to the Leibstandarte-SS 'Adolf Hitler' in the Balkans in spring 1941,

Wartime postcard portrait of the Dutch LtGen Hendrik A. Seyffardt. This long-time member of the NSB was named as the original commander of the Volunteer Netherlands Legion, and although he never exercised active command he remained a recruiter for the Legion as its honorary commander-in-chief until he was assassinated in February 1943. See Plate C1.

and on the Russian Front with SS-Div 'Wiking' in 1942/43. He was killed on 22 February 1945 when his car was strafed by an Allied aircraft.

C: DUTCH VOLUNTEERS, 1941

C1: *Luitenant-generaal* Hendrik A. Seyffardt; The Hague, October 1941

Chief-of-staff of the Dutch Army in 1934, the retired LtGen Seyffardt was a long-time supporter of the NSB, and from June 1941 he tirelessly promoted the raising of a Dutch unit to fight on the Russian Front. He would remain associated with the Legion as honorary commander-in-chief until his assassination by the Dutch Resistance on 6 February 1943. This figure shows him in the Ridderzaal courtyard of the Binnenhof building in the Dutch capital on 10 October 1941, at the swearing-in ceremenony for III. Bataillon of the Volunteer Dutch Legion. He wears Dutch M1934 uniform in the 'field-grey' first adopted in 1914, with the M1915 general officers' cap. Rank insignia (four silver stars, within serrated gold edging) is displayed only on the collar, but general officers displayed double dark red stripes on their breeches. The holstered pistol is a Belgian FN weapon.

C2: *Legions-Schütze, Freiwilligen Legion Niederlande*; The Hague, October 1941

Taking part in the same ceremony as LtGen Seyffardt, this volunteer infantry private has been adorned with flowers for the celebratory occasion. He wears a newly issued field-grey Waffen-SS M1936 uniform with initial versions of the distinctive insignia. Obscured here on his right collar patch is a white-metal 'wolf hook' (as Plate E1), and wrongly placed immediately below the eagle-and-swastika on his left sleeve is the first-pattern national arm shield. His cuffband is of the somewhat crudely made and short-lived *'Legion Niederlande'* type.

C3: ***SS-Schütze, SS-Frw Standarte 'Westland'*; Munich, spring 1941**

One of the 600 or so Dutch volunteers who had enlisted in this regiment by February 1941, depicted under training near the Freimannkazerne. The SS-runes right collar patch is obscured, and in the field he does not display the regiment's white 'W' cypher on the shoulder straps, but note the *'Westland'* cuffband. As the No.2 of his squad's MG34 team, he carries the spare barrel in a metal *'Laufschützer*' canister. His personal weapon is a P08 pistol holstered on his belt, but he retains the *Seitengewehr* 84/98 bayonet next to his folding entrenching tool.

D: *FREIWILLIGEN LEGION NIEDERLANDE*, RUSSIA, 1942

D1: *Legions-Sturmann, Stabskompanie*; Selo Gora area, summer 1942

This lance-corporal-equivalent belongs to the Pionier Zug of the Legion's HQ company; in 1942 this platoon was commanded by Leg-Ustuf Quintus De Veer, later to distinguish himself with the 'Nederland' Brigade's artillery regiment. Paddling a rubber boat across one of North Russia's innumerable watercourses, he is dressed and equipped like any Waffen-SS rifleman apart from the Legion's 'wolf hook' right collar patch, here in the horizontal variation.

D2: *Legions-Schütze*; Volkhov front, February 1942

His unit identified only by a vertical 'wolf hook' collar patch, this volunteer has just got hold of a Soviet PPSh41 sub-machine gun – a prized capture. Over his uniform he has no protective clothing in the bitter cold, but is camouflaged against the snow by a long, thin, loose coat with a detachable hood. He also seems to have acquired somehow a mountain trooper's *Gebirgsmütze* visored cap in place of his *Schiffchen* field cap; the visored *Einheitsfeldmütze* was not issued until summer 1943.

D3: *Legions-Schütze*; Leningrad front, June 1942

By contrast, in the humid northern summer this off-duty volunteer wears a mosquito-netting hood, which he has pushed back to allow him to eat from his mess-tin. Otherwise he wears his field cap, a mouse-grey shirt, and field-grey trousers gathered over ankle boots. Displayed outside his log-and-earth defensive position is a placard painted with the SS runes and death's-head, the Dutch 'wolf hook', and what seems to be a translation of the SS motto 'Honour is Loyalty'.

E: INSIGNIA

Collar patches

The Legion wore the runic *Wolfsangel* or 'wolf hook' emblem of the Dutch National Socialist Movement's *Weer Afdeelingen* armed sections (WA) in two alternative forms: one showed a smaller upright rune, and the second a larger horizontal version. Both seem to have been worn indiscriminately, and although the creation of the 'Nederland' Brigade in October 1943 gave all personnel the right to display the SS double-runes some veterans certainly retained the 'wolf hook' patch as a mark of pride.

E1: Dutch-made vertical *Wolfsangel* in white metal.

E2: Dutch-made vertical cotton-embroidered *Wolfsangel*.

Photographed during a January 1942 swearing-in ceremony, this volunteer for the Legion displays on his left sleeve the original and short-lived flag-shaped national patch in blue, white and red within a narrow yellow border, as Plate E5. (US NARA)

A German SS-Unterscharführer serving with the Legion who was decorated with both classes of the Iron Cross for his conduct during the Volkhov front fighting of early 1942. Note that he displays on his silver-edged NCO's collar the vertical *Wolfsangel* right collar patch and left rank patch, and on his left forearm the unit's cuffband, but not a Dutch national shield. A soutache of pale *Waffenfarbe* branch colour surrounds the SS death's-head cap badge; this might be in the pink of the anti-tank company, the cavalry golden-yellow of the reconnaissance company, or the lemon-yellow of the signals company. (US NARA)

E3: German-made horizontal embroidered *Wolfsangel*, officially authorized in November 1941.
E4: Three-legged *trifos* patch issued to SS-Freiwilligen Standarte 'Nordwest' before its disbandment in September 1941 and the dispersal of its personnel, including Dutchmen, to their national Legions.

E5: *Legions-Schütze*, Frw Legion Niederlande, summer 1941

He wears the standard-issue field-grey M1936 uniform of a Waffen-SS infantry private, with right collar patch as E1 (obscured here), the first Dutch-made national sleeve patch, and the cuffband as E10.

Sleeve patches

The volunteers of the European volunteer Legions wore patches in their national colours on the left sleeve of German uniforms, and in the case of the Dutch volunteers several types, of Dutch and German manufacture, are known. Initially they were placed at mid-sleeve below the eagle-and-swastika, but more usually on the forearm above the cuffband. There were at least four Dutch-produced versions **(E5–E8)**, and two German patterns **(E9 & H2)**. The shades of red (more or less orange) and of blue (from light to dark) seem to have varied due to dispersed production.
On figure E5: Horizontal *Prinsevlag* rectangle in red, white and blue within a yellow border.
E6: Small shield with pointed base, in red, white and blue striped diagonally from upper left to bottom right.
E7: Larger shield with rounded base, the red, white and blue diagonals slanting from upper right to bottom left. Note also rank badge of *Oberschütze.*
E8: As E7, but diagonal stripes reversed. Note rank chevron of *Sturmann*.
E9: German-made version, as E7 but in red, white and dark blue within a narrow blue border set on black backing. Note rank chevrons of *Rottenführer.*

Cuffbands

Until November 1941 personnel serving with Freiwilligen Legion Niederlande were allowed to wear a Dutch-manufactured cuffband with the German-language inscription *'Legion Niederlande'* (see photo opposite).
E10: The Germans then introduced another, lettered *'Frw. Legion Niederlande'.*
E11: Shortly afterwards, a third pattern introduced the mixed German–Dutch spelling *'Frw. Legion Nederland'*. With the upgrade to brigade status in October 1943, a fourth and final pattern was introduced, machine-woven *'Nederland'* in pale grey BeVo-type script (see photo opposite).
See also Plate H5 & H6.

F: 4. SS-FREIWILLIGEN PANZERGRENADIER BRIGADE 'NEDERLAND'; ESTONIA, 1944

F1: *SS-Schütze, SS-Frw PzGren Regt 48* '*General Seyffardt*'; late January

Depicted during the hard-fighting retreat from the Tannenberg position to the Luga River at Keikino, this volunteer wears the excellent padded, reversible, SS winter camouflage jacket and overtrousers with the white side outward, and one of several types of felt and leather overboots. Hanging from a button is a *Taschenlampe* flashlight. He has acquired a holstered P38 pistol, but otherwise only basic belt equipment is visible: triple M1911 rifle cartridge pouches, a breadbag and a water canteen. His weapon is the seldom-seen Gew 41W, a semi-automatic rifle made by Walther; the external magazine was fixed, and had to be loaded from the top from two standard 5-round stripper clips.

F2: *SS-Unterscharführer, SS-Frw PzGren Regt 49* '*De Ruiter*'; March

This sergeant-equivalent is in the Lilienbach sector of the Narva bridgehead defences. He too wears the padded reversible jacket, but with the 'autumn'-camouflage side outwards. His padded overtrousers are of the earlier grey pattern, and he wears a locally acquired fleece cap with the metal insignia from his service cap added. His weapon is the MP40 sub-machine gun; the fact that belt equipment is limited to magazine pouches suggests that he is in a fixed defensive position in this ruined village.

F3: *SS-Untersturmführer, SS-Frw Art Regt 54*; August

This second lieutenant-equivalent displays artillery-red *Waffenfarbe* in his shoulder-strap underlay. Use of the *Schiffchen* cap at this date suggests that he is a veteran,

(Upper) The original 1941 white-on-black Dutch-made '*Legion Niederlande*' cuffband; compare with Plates E10 & E11. (Author's photo)
(Lower) The Bevo-type pale grey machine-woven cuffband introduced in 1943 for the 4. SS-Frw PzGren Brigade 'Nederland'. (Courtesy Hugh Page Taylor Collection)

and this is confirmed by the old vertical Wolfsangel collar patch and '*Frw. Legion Niederlande*' cuffband. His equipment is a map case, a holstered P38 and 6x30 Dienstglas binoculars.

G: PERSONALITIES

G1: *SS-Brigaf u. Genmaj der Waffen-SS* Jürgen Wagner, summer 1943

Depicted here in everyday service dress, Wagner took over the Legion in summer 1943, in the rank of SS-Oberführer (brigadier), during its reorganization in Thuringia, and he commanded the 'Nederland' Brigade and Division until the end of the war. He managed to achieve many defensive successes in the face of great odds and was noted for his skill in tactical command. Wagner was awarded the German Cross in Gold in December 1942 as commander of SS-PzGren Regt 9 'Germania' in the SS-Div 'Wiking'; the Knight's Cross in July 1943, and the Oakleaves in December 1944. Extradited to Yugoslavia in 1947 (for what crimes, it is unclear), he was executed by firing squad on 27 June 1947.

G2: *SS-Oscha* Derk Elsko Bruins, 1. / *SS-PzJäg Abt 54*; February 1945

As a senior NCO, Bruins wears the visored 'officer's old-style field cap' (called by collectors a 'crusher cap') with the field-grey 'special' vehicle uniform of the Sturmartillerie. As an SS-Rottenführer gun commander in August 1944 he knocked out at least 12 Soviet tanks during fierce fighting in the Narva–Hungerburg area, and was awarded the Knight's Cross (the second Dutchman to be so decorated) on 23 August. A photo of the promoted SS-Scha Bruins at that time shows his collar patches edged with non-regulation pale piping, presumably the pink *Waffenfarbe* of anti-tank troops, but this is absent from a 1945 photo. He was promoted SS-Oberscharführer during the organization of 23. SS-Frw PzGren Div 'Nederland' in February 1945 and survived the war. He later took German nationality, and died in Germany in 1986.

G3: *SS-Oscha Gerardus Mooyman, SS-PzJäg Abt 54;* March 1944

Mooyman had volunteered for the SS-Regt 'Nordwest' before being transferred to the Volunteer Netherlands Legion, and went on to serve in the Brigade and Division 'Nederland'; he is depicted in the rank he held during the battle of Narva. He wears an M1943 'universal field cap' with Waffen-SS insignia, and a shortened version of the M1944 SS camouflage jacket complete with shoulder straps of rank, sleeve eagle and decorations; note that this senior NCO rank entitled him to wear an officer's belt. Mooyman was awarded the first Knight's Cross to a foreign volunteer on 23 February 1943, as a Legions-Sturmann gun captain in the Legion's 14. (Panzerjäger) Kompanie, for destroying 17 Soviet tanks within two weeks. He would end the war as a second lieutenant, with a total of 23 tank 'kills'. He died in 1987.

H: INSIGNIA & FLAGS

H1: Personal standard of LtGen H. A. Seyffardt as commander-in-chief of the Volunteer Netherlands Legion.

H2: Final design of German-made Waffen-SS sleeve shield for the Brigade and later Division 'Nederland'. Although this has been illustrated, there are no photos or accounts testifying to its actual use.

H3: Pennant presented by LtGen Seyffardt on 11 October 1941 to NSB-WA volunteers who were supposedly to form I. Btl of the Volunteer Netherlands Legion (in the event they were posted to III. Bataillon).

H4: Dutch postage stamp issued during the occupation of the Netherlands, publicizing the Volunteer Netherlands Legion.

H5: At the request of 1. Kompanie / SS-Frw PzGren Regt 48, a cuffband inscribed '*General Seyffardt'* in memory of the assassinated general was introduced, almost certainly in October 1943, and used throughout the regiment. It was evidently manufactured by BeVo, but the existence of a Dutch-produced version is also confirmed. This cuffband is described as very rare.

H6: Even rarer was the cuffband introduced shortly afterwards for SS-Frw PzGren Regt 49, lettered *'De Ruiter'.* At the time of writing there are no known photos of it being worn, but accounts by veterans confirm its existence.

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TITLE PAGE
March 1944: Dutch Panzergrenadiers of the 'Nederland' Brigade on the move inside the Narva bridgehead, March 1944. (US NARA)

BACK COVER
Anonymous Dutch Waffen-SS volunteer, photographed for a wartime leaflet; and wartime recruitment poster featuring the 17th-century Dutch hero of the Anglo-Dutch wars, Admiral De Ruyter.

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Author's Note

To retrace the operational history of these units, I have referred mainly to archival documents and wartime publications, but also to post-war published works – see Select Bibliography.
For obvious reasons of space, it has been necessary to limit the fuller available details of the war diary, particularly for the Narva campaign, to a shortened precis.

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Artist's note

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On 26 February 1943 the 19-year-old Legions-Sturmann (Lance-Corporal) Gerardus Mooyman, a gun captain in the Legion's 14. (Panzerjäger) Kompanie, became the first foreign volunteer in the German forces to be decorated with the Knight's Cross, in recognition of destroying 17 Soviet tanks between 31 January and 13 February. His decoration ceremony was filmed for the newsreel *Die Deutsche Wochenschau*, shown in cinemas across half of Europe, and was celebrated in the print media. Commissioned in June 1944, Mooyman continued serving with SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 23 until the end of the war, being credited with a total of 23 tanks destroyed. (Courtesy Hugh Page Taylor Collection)